DOCTORAL THESIS

Film as Argument: Mainstream Feature Filmmaking as the Social Practice of Incognizant Argument Design and Delivery

Fisher, Darren Paul

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Film as Argument:

Mainstream Feature Filmmaking as the Social Practice of Incognizant Argument Design and Delivery

Darren Paul Fisher

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Dr. Damian Cox and Dr. Michael Sergi

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Abstract

There is a consensus amongst film historians that the practice of making narrative feature films started 110 years ago in Australia with *The Story of The Kelly Gang* (Charles Tait, Australia, 1906), the first released feature film. But what precisely is the practice of making narrative feature films?

There is a significant body of literature regarding the intrinsic nature of narrative cinema, as well as how to write, direct or produce narrative films. However, whilst much of this literature seeks to improve the practice of narrative feature filmmaking, what constitutes the practice – in the teleological sense – is a fundamental question in its own right.

In this thesis I articulate and defend an account of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking in terms of the purpose the current social practice of making mainstream narrative feature films serves. The central proposition defended is that the practice of making mainstream narrative feature films is intrinsically the practice of constructing an argument: to move the audience to a worthwhile conclusion in a worthwhile way.

I examine existing literature on the subject of argument in mainstream narrative feature films from academic and professional perspectives to demonstrate that it is not simply a case that mainstream narrative feature films have the *capability* to argue, or that *some* films can argue well, but that currently *the practice of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking is fundamentally the practice of designing and delivering edifying arguments.* If a film's argument is removed or significantly flawed, then the film fails to meet the internal standards of the practice of mainstream narrative filmmaking.

In defending this claim, I set out in detail what is meant by the terms 'mainstream', 'argument', 'success' and 'failure' in terms of the current practice, how argument manifests and functions within a cinematic context, as well as an account of how films compensate for flawed argumentation.

Keywords

Argument, Internal Goods, Narrative feature film, Mainstream, Ethics, Compensation

Declaration by Author

This thesis is submitted to Bond University in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

This thesis represents my own original work towards this research degree and contains no material that has previously been submitted for a degree or diploma at this University or any other institution, except where due acknowledgement is made.

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Darren Paul Fisher, December 2020

No Copyright Declaration

No published manuscripts were included for publication within this thesis.

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Finally, to my wife and children without whom none of this would have been in any way possible. I may – soon – have an evening free.

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Chapter One

The Scope and Scale of the Project

1.1 The Scope and Scale of the Project

The origins of this thesis lie in the claim that narrative feature films can actively perform philosophical argument. As I researched this argument, more fundamental questions about mainstream commercial cinema began to emerge. Are not mainstream narrative feature film screenwriters and directors trained (knowingly or unknowingly) in argument building? At one level, are not mainstream narrative feature films dramatized arguments, arguments that function to convince the audience of a point-of-view? This led to my main research question, put most simply as: *What is the current practice and tradition of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking from conception to delivery?*

The thesis is concerned with practice in the teleological sense, in terms of providing an explanation of practice in relation to the purpose the practice serves, rather than a sociological account as typified by Bourdieu (1972) and Giddens (1976) which primarily seeks an explanation by which practices arise. Both Bourdieu and Giddens are pioneers of practice theory, yet it should be noted that their notion of social practices include far smaller units of activity that will be used in this study. Giddens defines social practice simply as an "ongoing series of practical activities," (1976, p. 81), and Bourdieu developed his theory of *habitus* to explain individual human social practices as formed by subconscious dispositions located within the body itself (both physical and mental), created in response to social constructs (1990, p. 53). The precise definition of social practice used in this thesis will be outlined in detail in the next section and further interrogated in Chapter 3, and comprises a wider set of interconnected human activities over and above the straightforward execution of plan, method or the customary way of doing something.

The teleological approach also differs from a more traditional cultural studies approach, which – although sociological in nature – rather seeks to explain and interpret the specific cultural origins and impacts of practices and texts (for an example of this with specific recourse to the film industry, please see Graeme Turner's, *Film as Social Practice*, 1988).

The teleological approach has been taken as the ultimate objective of the thesis is one of application. The study draws from and contributes to various bodies of knowledge: film-philosophy, notions of morality and virtue, and industry best practice – yet the primary purpose of the thesis is to be used as a tool to contribute to the improvement of the practice: to help filmmakers make better films. The study is significant as it develops from these complementary but disparate disciplines a new conceptual hermeneutic, one that is founded on the broader conceptualisation of narrative feature filmmaking as social practice rather than creative practice. Informed by the notion that film is a form of argument, this hermeneutic is designed for practitioners to assess and enhance their output. The thesis does not contribute solely to film philosophy, nor is it a typical screen craft work for industry, but rather a combination of the two with a singular aim.

Methodology

The thesis defended is comprised of three unequal elements:

a) The tradition and current practice of making mainstream narrative feature films is based on the 'Internal Goods' of the practice, as all practices are so governed.*
b) The 'Internal Goods' of the practice of making mainstream narrative feature films is to move people in a worthwhile way to a conclusion that is worth having: not simply to make an argument, but to make an argument worth making and to make it with integrity.
c) Most practitioners do not conceptualize mainstream narrative feature films in this way, which makes the tradition an incognizant practice.

*The 'Internal Goods' will be defined and explored in *1.2 Definitions of Key and Related Concepts.*

The study is fundamentally an exercise in critical hermeneutics. The thesis will be defended by:

a) A summary of current thinking with regard to the ability of film to argue, citing and exploring philosophical thought on the matter.
b) An analysis of the practice of the construction of mainstream narrative feature films from conception to delivery, citing industry-dominant theories of professional training and production in both major creative storytelling areas of screenwriting and directing. This will include a re-examination of filmmaking's

first principles with regard to cinematic storytelling tools, an extrapolation of what constitutes the 'Internal Goods' of the practice of constructing mainstream narrative feature films using the work of Alasdair MacIntyre (1981), and an account justifying why these goods are singular, rather than multiple in nature.

c) Evaluation and critique of other dominant conceptions of the internal goods of the practice.
d) An account of how the practice survives despite most outputs failing by the internal standards of the practice (an account comprising new conceptual work entitled the Cinema of Compensation defined in the following section and explored in Chapter 6).
e) Case studies of mainstream narrative feature film, including examples and counter-examples which would then modify the thesis, if necessary; and finally
f) An examination of the implications of this account of the internal goods of narrative filmmaking for professional practice.

The development of this thesis was due, in part, to the fact that I am both an academic and a practicing professional filmmaker with over 20 years of experience in the mainstream narrative feature film sector as a screenwriter, director and producer. Where it is possible, relevant and advantageous to the analysis I will include critical reflection on my own professional practices, but never as evidence to confirm or reject a theory.

Elements beyond the scope

This study is exclusively concerned with the tradition of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking. This puts other forms of mass media fiction, such as the novel, short story, radio play, television series, television serial, webisodes and podcasts, outside the scope of the thesis. There are concepts explored here that may also be applicable to these other narrative forms, but the focus is restricted to mainstream narrative feature films.

The focus on film-text construction to the point of delivery also puts all theories of film spectatorship beyond the scope of the thesis. Cognitivism, psychoanalysis and semiotics, and all theories of film that do not explicitly deal with the practice of filmmaking, are not the focus of this study. The thesis is not attempting a grand unifying theory of cinema, but offering a new, teleological understanding of the practice of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking.

1.2 Definitions of Key & Related Concepts

As has been referenced above, the thesis uses very precise – and sometimes uncommon – definitions of key concepts.

Practice

The thesis being defended is that mainstream narrative feature filmmaking is the practice of arguing. But what is meant by practice? As stated earlier, the study uses a teleological approach, chosen as the key outcome of the thesis is to contribute to an improvement in the practice. Alasdair MacIntyre develops a teleological account of what he calls social practice in *After Virtue* (MacIntyre, 1981), utilising ideas of internal and external rewards or goods of a practice. These concepts are at the heart of the study's conception of the professional practice of mainstream narrative filmmaking and will be explored at length in Chapter 3.

In addition to MacIntyre's teleological approach, his theories have been chosen due to their ubiquity and impact across multiple disciplines. When discussing educational theory, Hager (2011) begins with the question, "Why have MacIntyre's views on practice enjoyed such pre-eminence amongst philosophers of education, seemingly to the exclusion of other writers on the topic?" (p. 546). In over three decades since publication, MacIntyre has experienced relatively little contestation to his fundamental concepts. His critics, typified by Hager and David Miller (1994), focus more on the application of these concepts to specific practices (or non-practices), tending to discuss what qualifies as a practice and evolving MacIntyre's definitions and tacit implications rather than attacking the core underlying principles, which are essentially Aristotelian in nature (see also Frazer and Lacey (1994) for a feminist application of social practices and a defence of the notion of evil practices). Hager and his contemporaries (such as Smith 2003, and Wain 2003) are primarily concerned with justifying why teaching should be considered a practice (the exclusion of which is perhaps one of MacIntyre's most controversial claims), and Miller develops the concept further by subdividing the notion of MacIntyre's practice into 'self-contained' and 'practical and productive practices' which may influence the precise nature of the internal goods of specific practices (1994, p. 250). MacIntyre defines a social practice as:

> Any coherent and complex form of socially established co-operative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially

> definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended. Tic-tac-toe is not an example of a practice in this sense, nor is throwing a football with skill; but the game of football is, and so is chess.
>
> (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 187)

As noted above, this definition of a social practice is more complex than those offered by Bourdieu (1972) and Giddens (1976) and mainstream narrative filmmaking can be classified as a social practice in precisely the sense MacIntyre sets out. It is a complex form of socially established co-operative human activity (filmmaking is an established art and craft that comprises of many intricate stages (development, pre-production, production, post-production) and requires cast and crew that often numbers in the thousands).

MacIntyre claims that the internal goods of a practice are realized through the pursuit of forms of excellence that are partly definitive of an activity, with a resulting refinement of conceptions of that activity. This is why throwing a football with skill is not a practice, as it is both too simple to be a practice and it is not part of the action of throwing a football to reflect on the internal good and ultimate ends of throwing a football. The same can be said for tic-tac-toe. MacIntyre gives the example of chess as a practice. It is a game just like tic-tac-toe but much more complex and part of the practice of playing chess is to consider what excellent chess-play consists in, which something that evolves (1981, pp. 188-189). (For example, it may not suffice to win a preponderance of games in order to count as an excellent chess player. A computer that achieves this inelegantly, through brute force of calculation, may not be such a thing.)

Much the same can be said for filmmaking. It is clear from the literature both in the professional and academic world (examined in later chapters) that introspection and analysis of the practice and a constant defining and re-defining of its key excellences is a key part of the practice of filmmaking. These key excellences are governed by reference to the internal goods of the practice.

Paraphrasing MacIntyre (1981, pp. 188-189), the definition of 'internal goods' can be said to have two aspects:

1. Internal goods can only be specified in terms of a specific practice
2. Internal goods can only adequately be identified by participating in that practice

According to MacIntyre, this, in turn, renders any without the relevant experience incompetent as judges of internal goods. MacIntyre then broadens the idea of internal goods to encompass three universal virtues inherent in any internal good: "we have to accept as necessary components of any practice with internal goods and standards of excellence the virtues of justice, courage and honesty" (1981, p. 192). These he regards as universal human virtues that the practitioner must hold if they are to truly experience the internal goods of the practice.

By contrast, external goods are characterized as goods that:

> …[W]hen achieved … are always some individual's property and possession… External goods are therefore characteristically objects of competition in which there must be losers as well as winners. Internal goods are indeed the outcome of competition to excel, but it is characteristic of them that their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice.
>
> (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 190)

A good example of this is the chess player. A brilliant chess player who evolves the elegance of style of play (arguably an internal good of the practice of chess playing) achieves the internal good of excellence of play and the chess-playing community benefits as they learn new modes of (better) play. Contrast this with the chess player who cheats to win. They get the glory of the win, but the community receives no benefit, and will suffer if the dishonesty is ever discovered.

MacIntyre also sees a disconnect and potential danger with internal goods related to practices and the institutions that make those practices possible:

> Institutions are characteristically and necessarily concerned with what I have called external goods… they distribute money, power and status as reward… Indeed so intimate is the relationship of practices to institutions… that institutions and practices characteristically form a single causal order in which the ideals and the creativity of the practice are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution, in which the cooperative care for common goods of the practice is always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution.
>
> (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 193)

MacIntyre presents the relationship between the practice and the institution as one of dramatic irony. The institution enables the practice, but by its very nature is perhaps its most significant enemy. However, MacIntyre offers a solution by recourse to the virtues.

> In this context, the essential function of the virtues is clear. Without them, without justice, courage and truthfulness, practices could not resist the corrupting power of institutions…
>
> (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 193)

These virtues are crucial as without them practitioners would neither be able to achieve nor comprehend the internal goods that govern their practice. Think of the portrait painter (another discipline that MacIntyre defends as a social practice) who does not hold the virtue of truthfulness. If the internal good of portrait painting is to capture both the physical appearance and the soul of the subject, the virtue-less painter will be tempted to lie, to not discover the truth of the subject. They would also be unlikely to recognize the truth of the picture had they happened to mistakenly capture the essence. Furthermore, an agent not searching for truth would be unable to meaningfully re-examine the key excellences of the social practice.

To apply this to the social practice of filmmaking, if the internal good of the construction of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking is 'to move people in a worthwhile way to a conclusion that is worth having: not simply to make an argument, but to make an argument worth making and to make with integrity', then, if filmmakers (and the study will fine tune this definition further below) do not hold the virtue of truthfulness then it is very unlikely for them to achieve the internal goods of the practice. Nor are they likely to enjoy or properly appreciate these goods if by happenstance they manage to construct a film that argued with integrity.

The relationship of a social practice to the institutions that both empower and obstruct it is a complex and problematic one. On the one hand, the practice works within a set of institutions that depend on it (and it on them) but the social practice itself can be inimical to these institutions and the practice suffers because of this.

In terms of the practice of mainstream narrative filmmaking, the relevant institutions are the production company (a company whose function is to physically produce the film but not to distribute or exhibit it), the studio or organization that has contributed finance to the budget of the film, the distribution company responsible for releasing the film in a given

territory, the exhibitor, usually cinemas but increasingly online portals such as iTunes, as well as marketing institutions and public relations institutions. It must be noted that sometimes one institution can house all of these other institutions (usually with the exception of cinematic exhibition, which in the US between 1948 and 2020 could not be part of a production and distribution institution), but this is rare (Fisher, 2020). It must also be noted that we are in the era where one single individual can produce, finance, distribute, exhibit, market and promote their film, where this clearly is not occurring at an institutional level. A common combination is the financier/distributor institution, and most significant film studios operate on this level with regard to mainstream narrative feature films and it gives them significant power and influence over the product submitted by the filmmakers (Lobato and Ryan, 2011).

To use the studio as an example of the problematic relationship between the practice of constructing mainstream narrative feature films and the institutions that empowers it, it is clear that, as mainstream narrative feature films have very large production costs (according to industry budget and revenues monitoring website *BoxOfficeMojo.com*, the recent romantic comedy, *Bridget Jones' Baby* (Maguire, 2016) with no special effects or stunts cost $35 million US dollars), there would be no large scale practice without the support of significantly financed institutions. Yet the problem lies that the priority of the institution is not the same as the agents of the practice, and the training and skills base of the individuals involved in the institutions is different from those engaged in the practice. The institutions of feature filmmaking nonetheless have a strong influence over the result of the practice, namely the film itself.

The film studio (production company/distributor) is a corporation concerned with external goods, specifically the generation of income. In fact, it is their legal and fiscal responsibility to their shareholders or stakeholders to maximize profits. Unless an internal good of the practice is directly responsible for financial gain, it can only ever be of instrumental concern. If the internal good of a mainstream narrative feature film is to 'to move people in a worthwhile way to a conclusion that is worth having: not simply to make an argument, but to make an argument worth making and to make with integrity', but this conflicts with the potential maximization of box-office revenue, then the studio will attempt to involve themselves in the practice to change the product to best achieve their external good. For example, the studio insisted on a change to the end of the film that launched Tom Cruise as a star, *Risky Business* (Brickman, 1983) to make it more, as Tom Cruise reflected three years later in a conversation with Cameron Crowe, "upbeat and commercial" (Crowe, 1986). The director, Paul Brickman, resisted heavily but did not have ultimate power to defend his

story, so the change was made. This equivocation of happy endings with commerciality is something that will be explored further in Chapter 6.

Mainstream Narrative Feature Film

Initially the widest possible definition of a mainstream narrative feature film will be used. A mainstream narrative feature film is a fictional story that runs between 65-300 minutes where a series of events unfold usually with obvious causal connections and typically with the same group of characters, intended to be seen in one sitting requiring continuous attention from the audience, and deemed releasable to the general public by current established feature film distribution companies (both multiplex and art-house). It should be noted that this is a deliberately 'platform-agnostic' definition, as it does specify on which type of screen the film should be viewed. Streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime and Disney+ are vertically integrated producers, distributors and exhibitors of their work, be it in the traditional cinema setting on a mobile phone screen.

The latter part of the definition is linked to the practices of current film distribution companies. Because the mainstream evolves as the medium evolves, the definition must have the capacity to evolve also. What counts as a mainstream narrative feature film varies over time and in different cultural contexts: mainstream narrative feature films in the US in 1927 were silent films, making the first ever 'talkie' (even if it was merely five minutes of sound at the end of a silent movie) *The Jazz Singer* (Crosland, 1927) the risky avant-garde outlier. A current mainstream Bollywood feature film is considered to be a predominantly Indian cast in a musical/action epic spectacular in the Hindi language, such as the romantic-comedy-adventure *Chennai Express* (Shetty, 2013).

What is important in the initial definition of the mainstream narrative feature film offered here is a relativisation to the standards and practices of distribution networks. In an important sense, a mainstream film is just a film widely accepted as mainstream by that culture and can include non-narrative feature films. To qualify as a mainstream narrative feature film, the story must depict characters and events that are in some way causally linked. A film such as *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982), Godfrey Reggio's experimental documentary tone-poem about human impact on the environment, is indisputably a mainstream feature film – widely released (by major studio MGM in the USA), and indeed very popular (it currently holds an 8.3/10 rating from over 26,000 reviews on global film database site Imdb.com). However, it is not a narrative film because it lacks the presence of characters and causally linked events. However, it must be noted that these casual links between events in a

mainstream narrative feature film need not be simple, linear, or even complete. In fact some mainstream directors, such as Robert Altman specialize in stories of coincidence and parallel rather than causal closure (see dramas *Short Cuts*, 1993 and *Prêt-à-Porter,* 1994). Considered a landmark of avant-garde cinema, *Wavelength* (Snow, 1967) demonstrates that both characters and causally linked events must be both present and identifiable in mainstream narrative feature film as the film has a tight causal structure but no identifiable character. Indeed Snow is often thought of as a 'structural' writer and director, where the shape of the film is the point, the actual content peripheral (Sitney, 1979, p. 349).

There is much more that needs to be said about the role causally linked events and characters play in the construction of cinematic argument in mainstream narrative feature films and the study will take up this issue further chapters.

Although he is in no way attempting to be a 'structuralist' in the avant-garde sense, two-time Academy Award winner William Goldman theorises that feature film screenplays are nothing more than structure (Goldman, 1983, p. 195). He is clearly making a point to fledgling screenwriters, but structure is undeniably fundamental to feature films due to their significant running times designed to be experienced in one sitting. Using an analogy to the architect, a one-storey wattle-and-daub mud hut will need neither foundations nor much prior planning, but as the building gets higher new technologies are required. A narrative feature film is like a high-rise, it is not simply a collection of huts one above the other – it requires a completely different design to stop the building from falling down: *the argument is that structure*.

It is also key to the structure of a narrative feature film that the narrative (and therefore the argument) is completed in some way. Any ongoing television/web series or serial may cumulatively last longer than a narrative feature film but are designed to be open-ended which fundamentally alters the capabilities of the form and therefore the practice. As Mittell (2015) notes, "…the serial text itself is less of a linear storytelling object than a sprawling library of narrative content that might be consumed via a wide range of practices, sequences, fragments, moments, choices, and repetitions" (p. 7).

Traditionally, long form storytelling in television has taken four forms: Serial, Series, Mini-Series and Soap Opera. These are standard industry and consumer terms, and for the purposes of this chapter the definitions of Fiske (2011) will be used.

A serial is one long story arc (with subplots) that span it's entire run (sometimes referred as 'season' in the US). Serials "have the same characters, but have continuous storylines, normally more than one, that continue from episode to episode. Their characters

appear to live continuously between episodes, they grow and change with time, and have active "memories" of previous events," (Fiske, 2011, p. 151). This would make it difficult for a viewer to start watching mid-way through the serial. A series is sometimes what is also referred to as 'episodic television' even though serials are split into separate episodes, and is a series that is structured around stand-alone episodes that have an arc that concludes within each episode. "There is "dead time" between the episodes, with no memory from one to the other, and episodes can be screened or repeated in any order," (Fiske, 2011, p. 151). A series is designed for a viewer to be able to enter mid-season, which was very important in the days of terrestrial pre-video recording television, and much less relevant in the modern era of on-line viewing and DVD box sets. One useful example of a serial that became a series is the science-fiction television show *Dr. Who* (1963 onwards). It ran as a serial from its inception in 1963 until 1989. When it returned in 2005 it was structured as a series, perhaps in an attempt to maximize new viewers to the show.

The term mini-series is actually a misnomer, as it is a fixed episode stand-alone serial, rather than series. *Roots* (1977 and 2016) and *Band of Brothers* (2001) are well-known US examples of the miniseries, and the romance novelist Barbara Taylor Bradford had no less than four novels adapted into mini-series in the 1980s – *A Woman of Substance* (1984), *Hold the Dream* (1986), *Act of Will* (1989), and *Voice of the Heart* (1989).

The soap opera is essentially a never-ending serial, best epitomized by the UK soaps *Coronation Street* (1960-) and *Eastenders* (1985-) which have been broadcast without hiatus for the last 56 and 31 years respectively. As Fiske notes, soaps are defined by their "ongoing, serial form with its consequent lack of narrative closure, and the multiplicity of its plots," and "work through an indefinitely extended middle," (Fiske, 2011, p. 182). The term 'soap' is also used as an indication of domestic, relationship and family-based plot arcs, so a series can be referred to as having 'soap elements' if these arcs are present. To muddy the definition even further, the popular US serials *Dynasty* (1981-1989) and *Dallas* (1978-1991) were referred to as 'supersoaps', as although they were about the lives and loves of the super-rich, they did have specific and separate seasons.

So how do all these forms differ from mainstream narrative feature films? They all contain both characters and events that are causally linked. Three forms: Serial, Series and Soap Operas are open-ended, in that even if they ultimately are 'axed' as a show, as they inevitably must be (even *Coronation Street* and *Eastenders* will eventually cease broadcasting), due to the limitations of the industrial mode of production the makers of those shows will often not know which will be the last series and so are unable to write a cohesive

conclusion. The current trend is for season finales (final episodes) to leave more questions than answers to convince the audience and networks that the show must be renewed for a further season in order to answer these questions. On very rare occasions, and the high profile and highly regarded *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) was one of those, the makers of the show decide to stop once they believe the dominant story arc has completed (Plunkett, 2013). This is rare as the networks will want a series to continue as long as there is money to be made from its exploitation, and it is worth noting that the 'Breaking Bad' universe did continue in the spin-off series *Better Call Saul* (2015-), and the feature film *El Camino: A Breaking Bad Movie* (2019).

If a series, serial or soap opera is open ended, it cannot function as a coherent argument as there is no end. Another way to conceptualize this is to say that they can only ever be an incomplete argument, so the practice of making mainstream television series, serials and soap operas evolved in a different way. These formats can contain a consistent sensibility, for example *The West Wing* (1999-2006) clearly has a left-leaning liberal progressive bias, but there is little more structure that can be developed within it. Another negative impact that the industrial nature of television production has on the ability of a series, serial or soap opera to be able to function as an argument is that the longer a show continues, the more likely the key creative personnel will change, and with it as change of sensibility of the show, however subtle or extreme. Writers are replaced throughout the duration of a single series, and the showrunners, the overall creative heads of the television series/serial (Fisher, 2019a), may have longer tenures but often they too will be replaced whether they created the series or not. One high profile case was the firing of Frank Darabont as showrunner of *The Walking Dead* (2010-) despite being the series creator.

This brings us back to the fixed episode mini-series, now also referred to as 'limited' or 'event' series. It should be noted that the difference in these terms is purely marketing-based, with the head of the US television network FX explaining that the term 'mini-series' is tainted as "it became synonymous with big, cheesy melodrama," (Landgraf, quoted in Rose and Goldberg, 2014). However they are marketed, these series come to a definitive and planned end, so perhaps the practice of constructing mini-series is also intrinsically the construction of an argument? To investigate this in any detail is beyond the scope of this study, but it is certainly a possibility. However, to tentatively argue the counter position, the mini-series is split into typically four or eight parts, so unlike with mainstream narrative feature film the construction of the mini-series is likely to take into account that the viewer may not watch all parts (life has a nasty habit of getting in the way of viewing 8 to 10 hours

of programming) therefore much narrative redundancy has to be built into each episode, making any attempt to construct a convincing argument awkward at best. That is not to say that it is not *possible* that the mini-series could function as a coherent argument, but that the *traditional practice* of the construction of mini-series is unlikely to be the traditional practice of constructing an argument, as argumentation is not necessary and therefore not definitive of that practice.

However, in recent years the worlds of television and narrative feature films have been converging ever closer together both in terms of visuals and artists involved, and the argument could be made (although the study does not make it here) that modern serials, mini-series and 'event series' such as the aforementioned *Breaking Bad*, *Stranger Things* (2016-) and *True Detective* (2014-) are thought and referred to as more 'cinematic' (Stefansky, 2018), not because of high production value or the presence of Hollywood stars, but due to the fact that as these series and serials not only have definite ends, but can be 'binge-watched' on subscription video-on-demand services such as Netflix. This allows for them to be watched in one (very long) sitting, which enables the writers, directors and showrunners to create something much like an 8-13 hour mainstream narrative feature film. In fact, *True Detective* is an anthology serial, where it is not each episode that is self-contained under a series title (Schneider, 2016), but each returning season is based around a whole new cast and scenario, essentially making each season resemble separate long standalone feature films.

Argument

The following definition will be outlined at length in Chapter 2, but to provide a brief overview the thesis claims that narrative feature films convey arguments – yet these need not be philosophical arguments. The bar set for what constitutes a philosophical argument is still hotly debated, but is set far higher than what is expected of a conventional argument (Livingston, 2006, p. 15). A philosophical argument is an argument that satisfies a particular standard. It is not merely an argument to a philosophical conclusion. For example, a judgment that the body and mind are separate substances is a philosophical conclusion. Consider the argument: "The mind and body are separate substances because I very much want to be immortal and my immortality is most easily assured if the mind is a separate substance to the body." This is an argument to a philosophical conclusion, but it isn't a philosophical argument. Thus an argument counts as a philosophical argument only if it meets a particular standard of argument. It must supply philosophical reasons for a conclusion, not just any reason at all for a philosophical conclusion. But what is a philosophical reason? Perhaps the

most justifiable account of it is that a philosophical reason is one that meets a minimal standard of 'good reasons'. It needn't be perfectly logical (there are plenty of logically flawed philosophical arguments) and it needn't be sound or plausible, but its reasons must be relevant and potentially persuasive, depending upon other assumptions, particularly philosophical assumptions, and it must be logically attractive in the sense that it must be possible to see how a reasonable person might hold it to be logically valid when supplemented with appropriate additional premises. Cinematic arguments need not be philosophical arguments in this sense. For this reason, the study begins working with a minimalist conception of what an argument is, which can be stated thus: *An argument is an assertion supported by reasons to believe such assertion.*

The contrast between rhetoric, logical argument and sound argument is very relevant in examining how precisely film argues. To delineate the different forms of argument, this study uses the negative connotation of the term 'rhetoric' to mean the discipline of persuading others through the *appearance* of truth (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). Aristotle's specific use of the concept and its constituent parts will be explored separately in Chapters 2, 5 and 7. Because rhetoric aims at the appearance of truth, rather than truth as such, it may employ false reasoning without undermining its project. For examples, one has only to look at most arguments made by the Trump presidential campaign of 2016, cited as the start of post-truth politics (Davies, 2016). For instance, the argument a that a wall will keep out Mexicans is good example of rhetoric as it feels true (walls stop people from gaining access) but fails to take into account either its height or the effectiveness of a wall so long that it is still essentially an unguarded border. In spite of this obvious point, the idea of a wall as a means of keeping others out feels effective, which contributes to the overall effectiveness of the rhetorical argument for it (*Donald Trump's Mexico Wall: Who is going to pay for it?,* 2016). A logical but unsound argument is one that is internally systematic and logically valid but starts from a false premise (such as it is logical to assume that if climate change does not exist no action is necessary); a sound argument is a logically valid argument that starts from true premises (climate change does exist so we have to do something about it). How mainstream narrative feature films argue, and whether this allows for rhetoric and unsound arguments, will be interrogated fully in Chapter 2.

Filmmakers

As the construction of mainstream feature film is a creative collaboration, it is necessary to delineate precisely what the study means when it refers to a 'filmmaker'. The answer is not as

straightforward as it seems, as the various roles that can be attributed to 'filmmaker' have very different skill bases.

Notwithstanding the plural term 'filmmakers' which can refer to the production team as a whole, there are three key candidates when it comes to the mantle of filmmaker. First, the director of the film: as Bordwell, Thompson and Smith comment, "it is the director who makes the crucial decisions about performance, staging, lighting, framing, cutting and sound," (Bordwell, Thompson and Smith 2018, p. 34). The film is the director's 'vision,' and they steer this vision onto the screen, being involved in the project in terms of script, pre-production, production and post-production. Their job is complete when they deliver the film to the producer or production company or distributor. Unless the director is extremely high status, the director will not have 'final cut' of the film, the term for final say over the released cut of the film (Haase, 2007, p.64).

The term filmmaker can also be attributed to the producer of the film. There are typically four types of producer (in order of importance): the 'Executive Producer' (usually referred to as the 'E.P.') puts money into the film, either as an individual as head of the studio or production company – no industry experience or knowledge is required, just access to finance; the 'Producer' is the equivalent of Head of Business, they are part of the project from the very beginning, usually hiring the writer and director before organizing the finance for the film and seeing it through to delivery; the 'Associate Producer' is a junior role which involves liaison with stakeholders and technical personnel; and finally, the 'Line Producer', an employee of the production hired to organize the day to day running of the production (Bordwell, Thompson and Smith 2018, pp. 17-18).

Screenwriters are also sometimes referred to as filmmakers, but less often as their job primarily takes place off-set, their primary role to "prepare the screenplay," (Bordwell, Thompson and Smith 2018, p. 18). Alternatively, screenwriters are referred to as filmmakers when they are also the director. Occasionally, as noted above, the entire crew is referred to as 'filmmakers' when a screen-related article wants to make a general point about the production and wants to personalize it.

The industrial nature of narrative feature film production means that almost no two films have the same combination of screenwriters, producers and directors working in exactly the same way, with consistent power dynamics, and none of these roles require any specific qualification, creative or otherwise. Literally anybody can legally call themselves a screenwriter, producer or director.

As a director, hired to steer your vision of the film onto the screen, creative control is key. But as described earlier, the industrial nature of production (the influence of the institutions) can throw this process out of kilter. The first most common circumstance is that even though the director is the head creative, the real power lies with whoever finances the film. This essentially means that the E.P. is potentially the key creative, but usually defers to the director. (This is an example of the institution not interfering in the practice.) However, if an E.P. does get involved, this can radically alter the creative elements of the mainstream narrative feature film. This is not the only corruption of the practice. Another way the process is thrown out of kilter is when there is a significant star involved. Even though they are 'just an actor' and officially have no power in terms of overall direction of the film creatively, if they choose to do so, they can exert irresistible pressure, often to the extent that the E.P. will defer to them creatively. This is in part due to the likely fact that the E.P. wants to keep the star happy, and often partly due to the fact that if the star decides to walk off the set, millions will be lost and the film may languish incomplete. (Directors can always be replaced, but not actors once a significant portion of the film has been shot.)

In this way, even though the director should technically be overseeing all creative aspects of the production, depending on the production, the producers, E.P. or even actors can be the real lead influencer of its creative elements. Ultimately, even if production has gone smoothly, the producers still have the right to change the film. This can be problematic as producer roles not only do not require any formal or informal training in storytelling, it is not the skills base of such roles.

This is a critical distinction. Screenwriters and directors will likely have dedicated their life to the study of story and storytelling (either formally or informally) and there is an industry expectation, if not a reliance, that they have a strong conceptual grip of how to construct a feature film narrative. The industry expectation of a producer is that they will be highly conversant in how to structure finance and close deals, and perhaps be an effective assessor of talent, but there is not the same expectation or reliance that they have a developed sense of story. This is troublesome for a role that can hold ultimate creative control.

There are always exceptions, and producer 'pairs' are a recognised structure – such as Nik Powell and Stephen Woolley in the UK and Don Simpson and Jerry Bruckheimer in the US. In these cases , one producer is good with the deal and one is good with material and talent. However, producers primarily need to know how to trigger finance and oversee physical production, not improve story. Another exception is that to retain more creative

control, directors often work as producers on their own films, which is why writer/producer/director is a common production credit.

Sometimes the producer will be a representative of the institution, in the sense that they reflect the fundamental financial interests of the institution, sometimes they will be independent (Bordwell, Thompson and Smith 2018, p. 17), but in both cases the position does not require (even if it is welcomed) an advanced understanding of cinematic storytelling. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, 'filmmaker' is either a screenwriter or director. As the term is particularly fluid, from this point on the study will instead refer to screenwriters or directors (singularly or collectively) as 'practitioners'. Wherever there is a third-party reference to 'filmmakers', the study will clarify the definition and specify a precise production role.

Delivery

As stated earlier, the thesis will develop an account of the practice of making mainstream narrative feature films from conception to delivery. But what precisely is delivery and how does it work? And how does this affect the scope of the study?

On a typical mainstream film production (either independently financed or through a studio), delivery is the point in the production: when the director delivers the completed film to the distributor. (As has already been mentioned, in a studio film the production company is often also the distributor, so in this case it can be thought of as the distribution department). Most film directors do not have final cut. It is rare as it means other stakeholders have no legal control over the material, with distributors only able to cancel release, rather than modify the work itself. Prior to the final cut, a distributor (who, even if they are not the principal production company, usually puts finance into the production budget of the film to secure the release in their territory) may have a say over the material. A distributor will only 'accept delivery' once they are happy with the work. This is a legal position, as once the distributor accepts delivery they are liable to pay for it. Delivery can be rejected for either technical reasons (the film master has physical glitches) or creative concerns. These creative rejections can range from the head of the distribution company not liking certain elements personally, or due to poor test screening ratings (if the distributor engages in test screenings). A very public example of this is the 'Alan Smithee' director credit (Pendreigh, 2000), created to reflect the scenario of a director's being unhappy with a final cut they had no control over (due to studio/financier/distributor interference).

In the US, as part of Director's Guild of America (DGA) rules, if a director is unsatisfied with the final cut they are able to remove their name from all credits – and until the year 2000 the 'name' of the director would be credited 'Alan Smithee'. This credit is no longer in use as the audience became aware of the practice, so presently a director is still able to take their name from the credits but a range of different alternative names are used to replace their name.

Whether a director has final cut is not crucial to the study. It is concerned with the construction of the mainstream narrative feature film up to the point that the director makes their *first* delivery to the distributor. It is at this point that the film is fully completed. This version of the film may be rejected by the distributor, but the film delivered to the distributor represents the total creative output of the social practice of constructing a mainstream narrative feature film. It must be noted that in some cases the output may or may not have suffered – or may have been improved by – interference by the executive producer, producer, financier, studio or distributor during the practice, but navigating institutional interference does represent part of the practice for the screenwriter and director.

Why the first delivery production point is critical is that is represents the moment when the film becomes wholly controlled by institutions and not those involved in the practice. What happens next is completely beyond the control or influence of those involved in the practice (the screenwriter or director), and these institutions, as previously discussed, have a whole different set of priorities focused on external rather than internal goods.

It must be noted that a film can be re-delivered any number of times. Again, looking at DGA rules (Director's Guild of America, 2019), as early institutional interference (during the first cut) has been recognized as problematic, the director is able to ban everybody from the editing suite for 10 weeks in order to deliver a cut of the film free of any interference. If the distributor does not like this version of the film as delivered, they are within their rights (unless the director has final cut) to ask for changes and this process can be repeated until the distributor is happy with the final product. If the director refuses then the distributor is able to fire the director and hire new crew to re-cut (and sometimes re-shoot) the film. If the director dislikes the new cut they are entitled to remove their name from the credits, as with the Alan Smithee example.

Because the practice of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking is only responsible for first delivery to the institutions, its internal success as a practice cannot depend on the eventual audience response. A film might be internally successful at first delivery, but made internally unsuccessful at final cut due to studio/distributor interference. In this case, it is not

that the final film is internally unsuccessful. It is that the internal success of the practice is not allowed to translate into the internal success of the screened product.

Success and Failure

If the thesis is correct and the practice of mainstream narrative filmmaking is a social practice, with a robust and constitutive set of internal good or goods pursued in a set of institutional contexts that supply external goods for the practice, then the term 'success' will have several meanings. A film that secures external goods for filmmakers need not be a film that secures internal goods. A film can be deemed successful in either of these senses. Mainstream narrative feature films that have been deemed 'successful' in terms of reception (either by critics, audiences or financial grosses) need not have secured the internal goods of the practice of narrative filmmaking.

The concept of success that principally concerns the study is the attainment of the internal good of the practice of making mainstream narrative feature films. This is to move audiences in a worthwhile way to a conclusion that is worth having: to argue with integrity. However, art as in life is rarely perfect so most films can be expected to 'fail' to varying degrees for a variety of reasons, be they institutional interference in the practice or directors whom do not have the skills, luck or virtues necessary for the attainment of the internal good of the practice.

The Cinema of Compensation

Given the account of internal success developed above, it is clear that many commercially successful films are internally unsuccessful and many internally successful films are commercially unsuccessful. Furthermore, it may well come as a surprise to many film practitioners that the internal success of their practice depends upon their success in constructing an argument. They may readily claim to aim at nothing more than entertainment or affective modulation of an audience. ("My aim in making a film is to scare the pants off my audience," or "my aim is to keep them on the edge of their seats," and so on. These alternate conceptions will be fully interrogated in Chapter 4). Yet what is happening in such cases? If the construction of a mainstream narrative feature film can be conceptualized as the construction of an argument, then these self-conceptions of the practice of filmmaking confuse the methodology with the objective. 'Entertainment', as illustrated in Chapter 4, is a function of the well-constructed argument; a well-constructed argument lays the foundation

upon which rests the ability of mainstream narrative feature films to entertain. It is the incognizance of this practice that allows such confusions among practitioners.

The Cinema of Compensation is an account offered in Chapter 6 that organizes various creative components when it comes to the construction of a mainstream narrative feature film. A compensation is a creative element that usually (but not always) exists as part of the original fabric of the mainstream narrative feature film, but is given *undue prominence* in the film in order to compensate for a flaw in the film's argument. A compensation is not usually a freestanding element but a level of *emphasis*: the creative combination is decisive. The flaw may be major (such as both being confused, unsystematic or based on obviously false premises) or minor (such as a momentarily lapse of logic with regard to a less significant area of the argument). As the study will argue that the practice of film-as-argument is an incognizant practice, this will most likely be conceptualized by the practitioners either generally as a 'bad' film, or more specifically as a film that might not entertain or engage.

Below is a current working list of the main creative elements that can be 'remixed' (or sometimes added with varying degrees of emphasis) so as to function as compensations. These will be explored further with recourse to specific film exemplars in Chapter 6.

1. Happy Endings
2. Franchise
3. Genre Conventions
4. Casting & Performance
5. Author
6. Visual pleasure
7. Spectacle
8. Sensation
9. Wish fulfilment
10. Music
11. Puzzle solving
12. Promise of the Premise
13. Recognition of Self
14. Dialogue
15. Strong Sequences
16. 'Based On A True Story'
17. The First

18. Homage
19. Fan Service
20. Obscurity/Chaos/Confusion

Compare a mainstream narrative feature film to the culinary arts. If the film is a plate of food, then in order to make up for a dish that the chef fears is not palatable enough (through design or execution), the chef may overuse the condiments. The salt and pepper were always meant to be a part of the dish, but now the balance is out (and in some extreme instances, extra ingredients are included that were never part of the original recipe). The taste *may* be more palatable as a result, but that is not the original point of the dish.

To convert this analogy to an example of a mainstream narrative feature film, let us briefly examine the 24th Bond film, *Spectre* (Mendes, 2015). Let us agree that the argument the film is making, as so many action films do, is that natural justice will always prevail, that good ultimately will triumph over evil, even if the methods of the good sometimes have to be questionable. In order to be convinced by this argument, we have to believe that both the characters and the plotting make logical sense. If not, the argument fails (full case studies will be explored in Chapters 7 and 8). However, in *Spectre* there are many character inconsistencies and breakdowns of logic. (Bond is injected with an established torture device that, for no explainable or established reason, does not seem to work on him; women consistently throw themselves at Bond sexually, despite his having no demonstrable charm.) Each of these inconsistencies weakens the argument to differing degrees. However, the director has the opportunity to distract from the impact of these flaws by using other creative elements. In this case, it could be argued that potentially the *visual pleasure* (*Compensation 6*) of the torture sequence (the intricacy of the torture device), the overtly tense *sequence itself (Compensation 15)*, or the immediately ensuing *spectacle* (*Compensation 7*) of a high production value chase sequence was sufficient to distract the audience. Now these elements were always designed to be part of the fabric of the film, but would have to be intensified if they are to be used as a compensation – so that the device is *extremely* intricate and beautiful or the sequence is *phenomenally* tense, more than would have been required for the narrative if the argument were better constructed. An example of a compensatory element that was not part of the original design of the film would be, in Bond's case, if he were made to disrobe for the torture, adding an exploitation element to the proceedings that would qualify as both *visual pleasure* and *sensation* (*Compensations 4* and *6).*

It must also be noted that this list of compensations can also function as ways to maximize the external goods of the practice. As stated earlier, as the concept of film-as-argument is not currently a dominant way of thinking about the social practice of the construction of mainstream narrative feature films, this would currently be conceptualized by both practitioners and institutions not as *how to compensate for a flawed argument* but as *how to insure against a film not being entertaining or engaging*, and the more pragmatic extension of *how to insure against a 'bad' film losing money*.

1.3 Conclusion

This chapter has set out the central thesis to be defended: that mainstream feature filmmaking is fundamentally the social practice of incognizant argument design and delivery. It has defined the key concept of social practice in the teleological rather than sociological or cultural sense, and with it the associated ideas of internal and external goods of the practice. Success has been defined exclusively in respect to fulfilling the internal goods of this practice, allowing a mainstream feature film to be a commercial and critical success, yet a failure in terms of the practice. The account of the Cinema of Compensation has been offered to articulate how these failures achieve these other, more externally quantifiable, notions of accomplishment.

This thesis, if proven to a satisfactory degree, has the potential to be highly contentious. There is currently no literature in either the academy or industry that conceptualises film in this way. However, it would be naïve to make the claim, however well researched, that industry practitioners have either misunderstood and/or are largely unaware of essential the nature of their practice, and not expect some resistance. As a case in point, the fact that the study includes screenwriters and directors but excludes producers from the definition of industry practitioners is likely to inspire vigorous debate alone.

To that end, it is critical as the study begins, to state (perhaps counter-intuitively), what the thesis is *not*. Most crucially, the thesis is not attempting to be a general theory of story or narrative, nor any universalisable conception of art. It is concerned exclusively with an account of the internal goods that are specific to the practice of making mainstream narrative feature films. It does not take an ontological approach to attempt to define what mainstream narrative feature films *are*; it is a study that does not speculate what films *could* be doing or *should* be doing, but rather making a viable case as to what the social practice of their creation is at this moment in cinematic history.

The specificity of the form is decisive, and although there may be some inevitable overlap it is not intended that any of the conclusions or arguments of this thesis be applicable to any other forms – especially other screen forms – be they emerging or established. For example, this thesis does not, and is not intended to apply to 'soap opera'. The open-endedness of the form, and the industrial rather than practitioner-focused mode of production (manifested by constant changes to the creative workforce) do not allow for the tradition of the internal goods to evolve as worthwhile argument and delivery.

What the thesis represents is a new teleological account of the internal goods of the practice that it is hoped will positively impact professional application. The conceptual hermeneutic developed by the notion of film as argument is designed solely for practitioners to assess and enhance their output: a diagnostic for industry, not a theory of spectatorship even if elements can be applied as such (please see Chapters 2, 7 and 8).

The origins of the thesis was borne from industry self-reflexion on the research question of mainstream narrative feature film's ability to argue philosophically, rather than a more traditional film studies approach of a literature review that revealed a resultant gap in knowledge. As the thesis is essentially a cross-discipline work, it is structured around two separate literature reviews. The first, in Chapter 2, is less traditional in that it outlines current thinking on film as philosophy to demonstrate the feasibility of film to function as argument, with section 2.2 a first demonstration of the conceptual hermeneutic when applied to a mainstream feature film. Chapter 5 is more traditional, and examines dominant theories of professional screenwriting and directing to establish precisely how industry practitioners are guided understand the practice. Chapter 3 further defines and defends the key conceptual frameworks of internal goods, external goods, virtues and agency, with Chapter 4 interrogating other competing accounts of the practice to establish flaws and lapses in logic. Chapter 6 outlines the Cinema of Compensation, new conceptual work demonstrating how the industry is able to function despite consistently failing the internal goods of the practice, with Chapters 7 and 8 comprising key examples and counter-examples of mainstream narrative feature films designed to both illustrate and test the thesis.

Chapter Two

Current Thinking on Film as Philosophy

2.1 Can Film Do Philosophy?

This thesis takes the position that the practice of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking is the practice of argument. As will be demonstrated in further chapters, this position has in some way been presupposed by filmmakers, critics, teachers, academics and film 'gurus' (self-styled or otherwise) for the last century of professional practice, but is not a commonly-held belief. The study will argue that argument making structures the practice of feature-length narrative filmmaking, even if filmmakers are not consciously aware of it. However, not only has the idea of *film-as-argument* not been explicitly and extensively defended, and is therefore not accepted as received wisdom, the proposition that film is able to argue *at all* continues to be hotly debated.

As stated in Chapter 1, as the thesis is essentially a cross-discipline work, it is structured around two separate literature reviews considering the major academic and industry discourses, debates and theories that inform and challenge the central thesis. The literature review contained in this chapter is less traditional, in that it outlines current thinking on film as philosophy within the academy to demonstrate the feasibility of film to function as argument, with section 2.2 wholly dedicated to exploring both how and what films argue, and how the conceptual hermeneutic can be applied. Chapter 5 is more traditional, and gives a brief overview of the relevant professional literature, before focusing on the dominant theories of professional screenwriting and directing to demonstrate precisely how practitioners are educated in terms of their own practice, and what critical concepts are underdeveloped or missing.

Academic debate about film's capacity to argue focuses primarily on philosophical argument. As the study will examine in this chapter, the parameters of what constitutes an argument *per se* is less stringent than those that constitute a *philosophical* argument. If film can be judged able to 'do' philosophical argument, then the case for film being able to argue coherently and understandably is solid. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to defend the possibility of film argument, in advance of the defence of the necessity of film argument (in successful mainstream narrative feature films).

Significant current participants in the debate – both for and against film being able to perform philosophical argument (which is usually referred to as 'film as philosophy') – include: Noel Carroll (1985, 2006), Damian Cox (2013, and with Michael P. Levine, 2012), Christopher Falzon (2002), Paisley Livingston (2006, 2009), Stephen Mulhall (2002), Robert Sinnerbrink (2011, 2016, 2018), Murray Smith (2006) and Thomas E. Wartenberg (2006). To maintain focus, this chapter will detail the debate among these thinkers, even if the debate is clearly built upon the ideas of others. Stanley Cavell is perhaps the most notable absentee. His work was groundbreaking (the Cavellian tradition is very much the idea of film being able to embody philosophical thought) but the general case for philosophy as film is most clearly and explicitly delineated by the authors listed above. Gilles Deleuze is perhaps a less surprising absentee. Deleuze had a strong interest in the intersection of film and philosophical thought (although not specifically philosophical argument), naming his study of images and thought "noology" (1995, p.49). He never stated that film is or is not capable of a complete argument, but did allow that some, but not all, films are capable of thought through image, noting that, "Godard transforms cinema by introducing thought into it. He didn't have thoughts on cinema, he doesn't put more or less valid thought into cinema; he starts cinema thinking," (2003, p. 141). However, as Deleuze takes a primarily semiotic approach (although at times also a sociological, technological, psychoanalytical, biological and historico-cultural one), concerned with classifications, taxonomies and typologies (most notably his notions of the 'time-image' (1986) and the 'movement-image' (1989)) his theories relevant to this thesis are those of spectatorship and as such are beyond the scope of this research.

Four Theses of Film-Philosophy

There are four main theses when it comes to the ability (or not) for film to perform philosophical argument. They are *The Bold Thesis*, *The Null Thesis*, *The Modest Thesis* and *The Moderate Thesis,* as defined by Cox and Levine (2012, pp. 8-10):

The Bold Thesis

This thesis sets the bar far higher than is required for the purposes of this study. "The bold thesis claims that a film's contribution to philosophy, if genuine, must be irreplaceable or irreducible to any other forms of communication," (Cox and Levine, 2012, p. 8). This is not a set of criteria that is necessary for this study, for the reasons the authors state, "…[W]hy think that the philosophical value of film is determined by its philosophical uniqueness?" (Cox and Levine 2012, p. 8). There is nothing in any conventional definition of argument that includes

a notion of exclusivity. This thesis is concerned with film as argument, not film as a unique form of argument.

The Null Thesis

By contrast, the Null Thesis requires film only be an inspiration for, or source material to, support philosophical argument.

> [Film's] only role is to provide an impetus to, or material for, philosophical work that is done wholly linguistically in written and verbal texts. Films don't themselves make philosophical points… To make philosophical points films must be paraphrased, interpreted, and then integrated into philosophical argument...
>
> (Cox and Levine, 2012, p. 8)

This thesis sets the bar significantly lower than is required for this study. If film is just material to be used in a philosophical argument, it lends no weight to the idea that films can, in themselves, meaningfully argue.

The Modest Thesis

The Modest Thesis sits between the Bold and Null theses, putting film on an even footing with other forms of argument.

> …[T]he modest thesis denies the uniqueness of film-philosophy. A cinematic performance of philosophy is not untranslatable into verbal philosophical forms; the philosophy can be re-expressed verbally without loss, at least in principle.
>
> (Cox and Levine, 2012, p. 9)

This allows for films to argue philosophically even if these arguments can be translatable into other forms.

The Moderate Thesis

The Moderate Thesis adds further weight to the idea of film being able to argue as it takes into account that film has ways of arguing that are particularly powerful.

> The key idea behind the moderate thesis is that films can sometimes be better at presenting certain kinds of philosophical material than standard philosophical genres are. This is not just because film can be more emotionally engaging and entertaining.
>
> (Cox and Levine, 2012, p. 10)

Filmic arguments are not necessarily unique in and of themselves, but the way the various forms and structures are combined in film makes for strong persuasive and argumentative capabilities. These forms and structures will be further analysed over the course of this study.

Significant arguments in the debate

To begin with Cox and Levine, both are in the 'moderate thesis' camp, arguing that "…films tell stories, make assertions, and state or intimate hypotheses that give people, and by extension philosophers, material to critically assess," (2012, p. 7), and that "…film can sometimes offer nuanced investigation of fundamental features of our experience, well beyond the ordinary achievements of written philosophical texts, and in doing so robustly refute hollow and simplistic ways of understanding life," (2012, p. 12).

Cox and Levine also believe that a philosophical view may be 'embedded' in a film without it being the intention of the director (or writer). This is obviously possible, especially concerning minor viewpoints, but less likely regarding significant viewpoints. For example, a 1960's Bond action adventure very obviously concerned with demonstrating good's ability to vanquish evil, can nevertheless express sexist viewpoints dominant of the time (Fisher, 2019). The study will return to this idea of authorial intention as it is a concern to many philosophers, and of direct importance to the defence of the thesis.

What is of particular relevance is Cox and Levine's ideas when it comes to precisely *how* a film argues:

> An important part of the way a film does philosophy is that it is able to capture argument in affective ways, i.e. in ways that have emotional as well as intellectual resonance for us. The emotion generated by a film can focus attention and enables one to "see" or consider or appreciate aspects of an argument that might otherwise go by the wayside. Except in the cases of empirical facts (i.e. "I see the cat is on the mat") belief is more often than not a function of desire and emotion as well as reasons and evidence.
>
> (Cox and Levine, 2012, p. 16)

This ability to stimulate emotion in cinematic argument is key. Emotional engagement is a significant power of mainstream narrative feature film, one that has had a profound impact on the development of the practice. It is in part film's ability to argue *well* that has allowed the social practice of film as argument to evolve. This idea will be explored further in section 2.2, and fully interrogated in the case study Chapter 7.

Another strong supporter of the film-as-philosophy concept is Stephen Mulhall. In his book *On Film*, (2002) Mulhall classifies the Alien tetralogy as anything but disposable popular culture:

> I do not look to these films as handy or popular illustrations of views and arguments properly developed by philosophers; I see them rather as themselves reflecting on and evaluating such views and arguments, as thinking seriously and systematically about them in just the way that philosophers do. … They [the films] are philosophical exercises, philosophy in action – film as philosophizing.
>
> (Mulhall 2002, p. 2)

What is represented here is the idea that these films are somehow unique as they are 'self-aware' of their thematic issues. Mulhall implies that only a few, genuinely philosophical films, manage this level of self-awareness. However, as this thesis argues, Mulhall's claim here indicates a misunderstanding of the production methods and realities of mainstream narrative feature film; a tradition that requires its practitioners to have explicit awareness of the argument the film is making, even if those practitioners hold a distinct (and the study argues confused) notion of the internal goods of the practice.

Mulhall's discussion of the *Alien* franchise films is consistently referenced and dissected by many of the philosophers in this chapter, among them Thomas Wartenberg (2006). The fact that Mulhall seems to separate the *Alien* films from other feature narratives, leads Wartenberg to conclude that:

> This dichotomy suggests that there is a domain of serious and systematic philosophical thought – to which the films he is interested in belong – and one consisting of handy or popular illustrations of the views developed by philosophers that does not count as involving serious and systematic thought.
>
> (Wartenberg 2006, p. 23)

This is a view seemingly shared by most philosophers, especially Noel Carroll (2006): some films are special as they can argue (philosophy). Whilst both Wartenberg and Carroll are in the *film-can-do-philosophy* camp, this does not necessarily make them strong supporters of the *film-as-argument* thesis. Their interest is focused on the question of whether film can sometimes, in some conditions, argue philosophically. Someone could believe this without being tempted by the film-as-argument thesis. The film-as-argument thesis is that, at the most intrinsic level, the practice of narrative feature film is the practice of the construction of an argument. This implies that all narrative feature films are arguments and the idea that only one or a few are, contradicts this. However, the film-as-argument thesis does not entail that every film *succeeds* in argument. Rather it is the view that argument is the implicit goal, the internal good, of the social practice of narrative filmmaking. As the thesis will examine, many, perhaps most, films will fail to reach this goal. So it is possible that Carroll and Wartenberg have simply seen such a number of failed arguments, they are therefore inclined to think that film does not, invariably, seek to argue.

Wartenberg argues further that not only can some films argue philosophically, but the very idea of films simply illustrating manifestations of certain philosophical positions is *in itself* a form of argument. He does this by using a scene from Chaplin's *Modern Times* (Chaplin, 1936) where Chaplin's production line worker continues to act as if he is on a production line even in other social contexts in order to demonstrate significant philosophical points about the "mechanization of the human under capitalism," (Wartenberg 2006, p. 30).

However, this scene-by-scene form of argument – or point making – is not the most significant form of argument for the film-as-argument thesis as it is the overall construction of argument that is primarily implicated. However, another comment from Wartenberg is worthy of note. He writes that "While philosophy is a practice guided by the desire to attain truth, films are normally made to engage their audiences," (Wartenberg 2006, p. 20).

This again indicates an understandable, but fundamental, misconception of how films are produced. It could reasonably be viewed that all art requires an engaged audience, but this does not necessarily mean that engagement at any cost, or mindless, pointless engagement is the aim of the practice. This will be further delineated when the study explores the 'cinema of sensation' in Chapter 4. Speaking as a professional film screenwriter, producer and director, perhaps the most used word when it comes to engaging audiences through creative voice, narrative, situation or character is *'truth'*: therefore the separation of the two concepts is problematic to the well-trained and experienced practitioner. As this study will demonstrate, the tradition of the practice of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking is an appeal to truth.

It is a win-win scenario: presenting truth is an internal good of the practice, and the audience connecting with truth is a fundamentally engaging experience.

But what is meant by 'truth'? In terms of narrative feature storytelling, there is a presupposition to a partial and aspectual conception of (certain kinds of) truth. If a practitioner makes a film about love, their truth may be that it is positive – whilst another practitioner may create a film about how it is negative. Both are right, both speak the truth, as they are exploring different aspects of a complex abstract concept. The truths aimed at in narrative feature filmmaking are not immovable philosophical certainties. They are the honest apprehension of an aspect of reality, of lived experience or social insight. Now, there are practitioners who work self-consciously, or self-deceptively, to tell falsehoods: comforting lies instead of difficult truths. Audiences must be engaged or the film will fail both creatively and financially, and those involved in a production may, for reasons of risk (big budget films need to big box office), take an easy way out and provide a comforting lie as the core argument of their film. Usually there is a middle ground, a comforting if unedifying and somewhat simplified truth – but sometimes a bad choice is made. However, the thesis claims that in this circumstance, if the practitioners were questioned about their production they ought to admit to, on this occasion, having 'failed' as storytellers.

Christopher Falzon, (2002) is another philosopher who believes that films can 'do' philosophy. But Falzon, understandably, has an incomplete understanding of their construction:

> Even if films are visual narratives that tend to make their points in the realm of 'action and appearance', we should not be misled by this into thinking that they have nothing to do with more abstract or general concerns… films are thoroughly constructed. As such they inevitably presuppose and draw on a multiplicity of ideas, conceptions of life and action, general views of the world and so on, even if these remain in the background, largely unreflected upon. There may be questions over what particular philosophical assumptions are being made in a film, but the general claim that films unavoidably make certain philosophical assumptions seems difficult to dispute.
>
> (Falzon 2002, p. 6)

One the one hand, Falzon takes into account that films are "constructed", but this idea that they are constructed through "unreflected upon" views of the world is problematic. Unreflected upon by whom? The characters? The practitioners? The audience? In the

development of a narrative feature film all aspects of a story are reflected upon in great detail, especially the central theme, or what is often called the 'controlling idea' (McKee, 1998, p. 115), so named as it literally controls every other creative aspect of the enterprise. It seems that some philosophers know that films are made, but think that practitioners are only concerned with the surface aspect of action and image and other elements just fall where they may.

Falzon also has an interest in the role of the image itself in philosophy.

> My own interest in images is not so much in the role of image in philosophy as in the philosophy we can discern through the image… As such, my interest is primarily in the cinematic image insofar as it serves to illustrate, insofar as it captures in a concrete way some aspect of philosophical thought. That is already to do more than simply illustrate philosophical thinking. To recognize philosophical ideas, themes, and perspectives represented in a concrete form is to call into question the perception that philosophy is remote from everyday existence, concerned only with abstraction and universalization.
>
> (Falzon 2002, p. 5)

Falzon's concern for the power of images to represent philosophical thought leads to an emphasis on micro-argument, of the kind discussed in Wartenberg's analysis of the scene from *Modern Times* and is consistent with a Deleuzian notion of general cinematic 'thinking' (1995, p. 49) rather than cinematic argument. This underestimates the full function of argument in the construction of film, and it is part of this thesis to demonstrate that a truly successful narrative feature film is a fully unified argument – every moment, every image, every scene, constructs the argument.

Falzon also shares some similar concerns with Murray Smith (2006), namely that there is a plethora of creative elements in a narrative feature film which affect its ability to argue philosophy effectively:

> [I]t needs to be reiterated that whatever engagement films themselves may have with philosophical themes and content, this can only be a part of what is going on in the film. Film is about a lot else besides, and in the end even the most 'philosophical' film has to get on with the action.
>
> (Falzon 2002, p. 7)

The conceptualization here that all elements of a film are not all connected in their construction is erroneous ('bad' films notwithstanding). Falzon might be talking about very specific philosophy being related in films by way of exposition and not film-as-argument *per se*, but his point is clear: on-screen action is separate from philosophy. This concept is false: action is a manifestation of argument – it would be like trying to remove zeros and ones from binary code; to an experienced practitioner, the idea is absurd.

Noel Carroll (2006) attempts to prove that just one film he has so far encountered, *Serene Velocity* (Gehr, 1970) can genuinely be proved to be an example of film doing philosophy by making a coherent philosophical argument. In this way, he is simultaneously a supporter and a critic of this thesis (even though *Serene Velocity* is not a narrative feature):

> For though state-of-the-art philosophy may be found in these [other] motion pictures, it has not really been made by means of the art of the moving image – namely, by means of the characteristic expositional devices of the various motion picture genres, including their recurrent visual, audio, and narrative structures.
>
> (Carroll 2006, p. 174)

By requiring "characteristic expositional devices" of the medium itself, he seems to be stating a version of the 'bold thesis', in that in order to do philosophy, a film must communicate in a uniquely filmic way. This is an often-cited criteria for 'film arguments' to fulfil, as it precludes a simple recording of a philosophical lecture (or argument). Citing just one example, he also could be taking the moderate line, that some films in some circumstances can argue philosophy better than written texts. The thesis being defended here has no such constraints. In the right circumstances, a scene where a character lectures philosophy, even if it isn't the 'whole' argument, is an example of film argument.

Carroll addresses the concern that films cannot help but typically be about a single case, whereas philosophy is about general claims – and that implies an incompatibility between the two.

> So the skeptic argues: philosophical knowledge, like all knowledge, requires, among other things, justified belief. A moving image may be capable of conveying a belief and even promoting a general belief. However, the tendency of the motion picture toward particularity, both in its images and its stories, entails that it is highly unlikely

> that a motion picture could ever justify any general or universal belief of the sort to which philosophy aspires. Consequently, the art of the motion picture is an implausible source of philosophical knowledge.
>
> (Carroll 2006, p. 175)

If a moving image is capable of promoting a general belief, then its capacity to convey argument is vindicated because film arguments typically aim at establishing general beliefs. Even if Carroll is right to worry about the capacity of film to convey philosophical universality and generality – and it is not yet clear that he is – it remains possible that film arguments unburdened by demands of philosophical generality are made by films as a matter of course.

Carroll continues to test the idea of film doing philosophy with his fictional 'skeptic'. First this skeptic is concerned that films do not provide enough 'evidence' to convince:

> [The Film] is still evidentially challenged, since the "evidence" has been constructed precisely to cast to best effect the general hypothesis the film is advocating. Or, to put it less charitably, the evidence has been cooked. Moreover, when one recalls that many of the films that may be said to do philosophy are fictional – with made-up stories expressly designed to fit their general theme – one may feel compelled to agree with the skeptic that much of the evidence in fiction films is not only statistically insufficient, but arguably tainted (or skewed) to boot.
>
> (Carroll 2006, p. 176)

This idea of 'film as evidence' is a particularly significant element of film's power of persuasion and will be examined in the next section of this chapter. Notwithstanding this element, Carroll's skeptic worries that films might evoke a belief, but do so by encouraging the viewer to think about the theme, guiding their meditation but not arguing as defined in this study. In other words, films can be thought experiments, but not arguments. Carroll counters by using Wittgenstein:

> Wittgenstein posed thought experiments whose precise ramifications were unstated; he left them to be worked out in the minds of the audience. But they were no less thought experiments for being less than user-friendly.
>
> (Carroll 2006, p. 181)

It is the thought experiment that does the philosophical work, that moves the mind of the prepared listener, and not the accompanying exegesis. Indeed, most often, the prepared listener may have no need for the exegesis.

> The skeptic should not mistake the accompanying exegesis for the argument. It is the thought experiment that constitutes the argument, not the prosaic explanation of the thought experiment. The skeptic must not confuse a predilection for explicitness for argumentation.
>
> (Carroll 2006, p. 181)

Just because the work is not explicit does not mean there is no argumentative work being done, and an explanation is just that, an explanation of an argument, not the argument itself. A good thought experiment is textured and creates in the mind of the audience just the desired reaction and response. It is a main tenet of narrative feature film storytelling that it is far better to let the audience do the work and come to the (right) conclusion that to tell them explicitly. Billy Wilder, the director of *Some Like It Hot* (1959), reportedly had ten story commandments of which number seven was "Let the audience add up two plus two. They'll love you forever," (Stevens Jr., 2006, p. 320).

The thought experiment and the 'paraphrase' of the film argument are two concepts that form the main battlegrounds between those philosophers for and against film-as-philosophy. This chapter has so far concentrated on those optimists who believe film can-do philosophy, and in many cases, better than other forms – but both the aforementioned Murray Smith (2006) and Paisley Livingston (2006), reject the notion as overambitious.

To first examine Smith, his paper *Film Art, Argument and Ambiguity* (2006) is directly concerned with the ability of narrative feature film to argue, and not necessarily philosophically. Referencing Mulhall, he notes that, "It's hard to avoid the conclusion that Mulhall believes that films, when acting as vehicles of philosophy, embody arguments (albeit, presumably, of an implicit and informal nature) in support of theses ("views")," (2006, p. 34). However, Smith has significant issues with this claim:

> The trouble is – a narrative is not, literally speaking, an argument. Of course, the idea that a narrative might imply an argument, or is some other way act to realize an argument, is an ancient idea. It is implicit in the assumption that certain narratives carry "messages," "morals," or "lessons," in the sense that these "morals," are like the

> conclusion of an argument. Some critics and theorists have spelled out this intuition more explicitly: Andre Bazin, for example, wrote that the "thesis implied" by Ladri di biciclette [Bicycle Thieves] (Vittorio de Sica, 1948) is "wondrously and outrageously simple: in the world where the workman lives, the poor must steal from each other in order to survive. But this thesis is never stated as such, it is just that events are so linked together that they have the appearance of a formal truth while retaining an anecdotal quality". What distinguishes Mulhall is the strength of the claim he wishes to make with respect to the potential argumentative "force" of narrative form. But the precise relationship between narrative and argument remains impressionistic and undertheorized. What is needed is an analysis of how a narrative can deliver the basic constituents of argument – premises, a pattern of inference, and a conclusion.
>
> (Smith 2006, p. 34)

Smith begins his theorizing by widening the discussion of the idea of films as thought experiments, and points out what he believes to be the fundamental difference: thought experiments in philosophy serve primarily *epistemic* purposes, thought experiments in narrative feature films serve primarily *artistic* purposes. However, as the study will show, this definition of the 'artistic' is problematic.

Smith uses the Steve Martin/Lily Tomlin comedy *All of Me* (Reiner, 1984) as an example. It is a film where two consciousnesses have to share the same body (one male, one female). One takes the left side, the other the right:

> … [T]he film uses the thought experiment primarily as a vehicle of comedy… So the film has an epistemic dimension – we might well be brought to reflect on personal identity by the film and learn something from it – but it is subsidiary to its comic imperative. This subordination of the epistemic to the artistic is surely the main reason by narrative films based on philosophical themes, like All of Me, will often compromise the "logic" of the philosophical problem that they dramatize… As that sage of Hollywood, Sam Goldwyn, might have put it: "Pictures are for entertainment – if I wanted to make a philosophical point, I'd publish an essay in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*.
>
> (Smith 2006, p. 39)

Whilst what Smith claims seems highly plausible, even likely, it is unfortunately speculation that does not account for how mainstream narrative feature films are constructed. For the practitioner, the internal good of the practice cannot separate the artistic from the epistemic. For a narrative feature film to function correctly, all must be unified – theme, plot, character – and this is what will make the comedy work, the *entertainment* work (as will be explored in Chapter 4). For a director to sacrifice conceptual logic for a comedy gag merely makes them a bad director (or to be diplomatic, a director who has made a poor creative choice). It is worthy of note that the Sam Goldwyn quote cited, although clearly included to illustrate the point, is actually apocryphal (Berg, 1998). In reality, as an experienced producer, it was highly likely that Goldwyn was well aware of the practice of narrative feature filmmaking. (In fact, he was almost always misquoted for comic effect, usually by his own press department at his behest as it made him a very marketable brand. Other famous yet apocryphal quotes include, *"Our comedies are not to be laughed at,"* and, *"The next time I send a damn fool for something, I'll send myself,"* (Boller Jr. and Davis, 1987).

As noted earlier in this chapter, Smith, as with Falzon, is concerned that film has too many elements with which to conduct a coherent argument:

> The difference raises the suspicion that the thought experiment serves different purposes in philosophy and artistic storytelling, respectively. Just what is all that detail doing there?!
>
> (Smith 2006, p. 35)

This seems to be a case of claiming something is unlikely because it is highly complex. "All the detail," are all the elements of a convincing filmic argument as the study will outline in further chapters. Smith does, however, allow that the epistemic priority does depend on genre:

> The conveying of knowledge or prompting of conceptual thinking is certainly an important part of the artistic value of many genres; in some cases, like that of documentary filmmaking, the epistemic value of a film may be absolutely central to the artistic value of the film.
>
> (Smith 2006, p. 39)

Whilst the epistemic status of raw documentary footage is far higher than that of fictional raw footage, and the documentary film may more regularly make appeals to more objective than

aspectual truths, the argumentation is equally shaped. In fact, the practice of constructing a documentary feature narrative is almost identical to that of constructing a fictional feature narrative, the elements of unity and truth to all creative elements integral; it is just the order of the construction that differs. Documentarians often 'rewrite' the film during the edit, based on discoveries made during the filming process. Whilst this also happens in fiction film construction, it is less recognized as normative and rather serves a corrective function.

In this way Smith could be viewed to agree with the moderate thesis "in some cases", although not the thesis defended here which makes the claim that the practice dictates the epistemic value is central to the artistic value for all mainstream narrative feature films. As the internal good of the practice, it is the very reason the filmmaker wishes to tell the story – be it aiming at a specific, general, objective or relative truth.

Smith attempts to prove his approach by appealing to notions of art in general. He invokes discussions of poetry, more specifically the quotes of Cleanth Brooks:

> When we consider the statement immersed in the poem, it presents itself to us, like the stick in the pool of water, warped and bent. Indeed, whatever the statement, it will always show itself as deflected away from a positive, straightforward formulation.
>
> (Brooks, 1968, p.172)

However, poetry is a very different medium to narrative feature film: the specificity of form is critical and is the reason many screen forms are beyond the scope of this thesis. Smith also uses Brooks to introduce the idea of 'paradox,' the idea that an artwork can hold in balance contrasting attitudes or meanings. Again, this may be a key element in the practice of poetry construction, but less so for mainstream narrative feature film production. As with any artworks, multiple interpretations are possible, but the internal good of the practice requires not contrasting but complementary meanings.

In contrast to Smith, Livingston's (2006) rejection of film's ability to argue philosophy is by recourse to the very restrictive bold thesis. He defines it as:

> (1) a conception of which sorts of *exclusive* capacities of the cinematic medium (or art form) are said to make a special contribution to philosophy and (2) claims about the significance and independence of the latter contribution.
>
> With regard to (2), a modest and uncontroversial claim is that films sometimes express or give rise to well-known philosophical questions and ideas… An even

> bolder contention would be that a film can provide a historically innovative contribution to knowledge regarding some philosophical topic, doing so in a significantly independent or autonomous manner, that is, the contribution would not be dependent on a subsequent paraphrase.
>
> (Livingston 2006, p. 11)

According to Livingston, for films to be able to make significant philosophical contributions, they will have to use techniques exclusive to film, be historically innovative and not require 'paraphrase' to be understood. Yet the requirement for historical innovation is surprising, as normal verbal philosophical argument does not have to be innovative. As Wartenberg (2006, p. 27) comments, "it is worth recalling that most philosophers philosophize without making original contributions to the discipline".

It should be noted that the concept of 'paraphrase' as Livingston uses it is not the same as used in everyday language. Livingston's 'paraphrase' is a paraphrase of a film that contains the complete argument *inspired* by events on screen: the film does not argue, it is all in the 'paraphrase'. However, as Robert Sinnerbrink says in *New Philosophies of Film* (2011):

> …[W]e are not dealing here with an argumentative claim so much as an interpretive proposal: a 'philosophical paraphrase' is not a theoretical claim about a film's philosophical content, but an interpretative claim or instance of philosophical film criticism.
>
> (Sinnerbrink 2011, p. 134)

In short, films do argue independently of paraphrase, with the paraphrase merely interpreting what is present in the film. This can be demonstrated by appeal to the evidence of the narrative feature film itself.

For example, take the film *Lethal Weapon* (Donner, 1987). Hollywood script consultant Dara Marks, in her book *Inside Story: The Power of the Transformational Arc* (2006), claims it makes the argument (as so many films do) that to live a life that functions as it needs to, one needs the right mix of danger and caution. The film is actually a dual protagonist story, in that there are two genuine heroes of the story who both learn the same lesson (in most circumstances there is a single protagonist, even if the film has multiple 'leads'). The set-up is simple. Two cops find themselves partners: Riggs (Mel Gibson) has a deathwish after the loss of his wife and does reckless, highly risky things to catch villains;

Murtagh (Danny Glover) is five days from retirement and wants to play it super-safe so he can live a full life with his family. Both approaches are shown to be wrong (wrong as neither man is able to achieve the outer goal – to catch the villains). Only when they shift their lives into balance (Riggs having more caution, Murtagh taking more risks) do they achieve both their inner and outer goals. Endings of films are key in communicating the point-of-view of the practitioners, functioning in much the same way as a conclusion in a more formal written argument.

Whilst with any mass text aberrant decodings are possible, if a film is correctly constructed with a unity of vision, then the argument should be clear by recourse to the film alone. If Riggs and Murtagh embrace their changes but die in the end, for instance, then the film cannot be presenting the argument that these changes are key to living a better life. However, the creation of a film involves many elements and it takes a truly skilled team to express an argument with clarity; a film that lacks creative clarity and unity is a film that makes an unconvincing argument (for further interrogation of these ideas, please see Chapters 2.2, 5, 7 and 8).

Livingston's restrictions seem particularly arbitrary, and they have little impact on the film-as-argument thesis as it has no such restrictions about the type of argument made by films. Films argue, but they do not have to be uniquely 'cinematic' (a slippery term at best), original, innovative - nor resist 'paraphrase' by any definition. In fact, paraphrasing (in the traditional sense of the term) the controlling idea is a key part of the script development process (McKee, 1998, p. 115).

Another key battleground is the idea of artist intentionality. This can be problematic when discussing film as it is a collaborative medium, involving many creative teams. The precise nature of the power relationships fluctuates from film to film (often the star holds a lot of creative power), however when it comes to the overall construction of a film and overseeing how the 'argument' is delivered, the design is usually to empower the director as the creative head responsible for most of the artistic intention of the piece (Bordwell, Thompson and Smith 2018, p.34).

Livingston gives some concessions to the film-as-philosophy camp, but takes a variation on the intentionalist line (2009, pp. 60-121). In fact, he defends an account of a concept he calls 'partial intentionalism', which involves "a 'meshing' or congruence relation between intentions and features of the audio-visual display," (2009, p. 7). Livingston only allows that films can do philosophy – can *argue* – if it can be proved using discourses surrounding the film that the director intended to philosophize seriously and significantly.

However, Sinnerbrink again holds a counter-position, that "It is not in the critical detection of artistic intention, but in the aesthetic transformation of these intentions, that we find the film's original and independent philosophical contribution," (2011, p. 131).

This is key to the thesis defended here. The process of creating a narrative feature film is essentially 'aesthetically transforming' the argument into a narrative that performs the same work to a more effective degree. Sinnerbrink himself sees film-philosophy in much broader terms than is taken up in this thesis. He states that "The encounter between film and philosophy invites us to explore novel ways in which our conventional understanding of philosophy – and aesthetic receptivity to new kinds of experience – might be renewed and transformed," (2011, p. 117).

To continue with Sinnerbrink, the final film-philosopher examined here, he has further developed some highly detailed theories of cinematic ethics (2016, 2018) that are particularly complementary to the central thesis and its defence of a cinema of 'worthwhile' conclusions and argumentation, especially in how films express ethical ideas and what kinds of ethical experience cinema is able to evoke. Sinnerbrink believes that, "There are four dimensions to the cinema-ethics relationship, including an aesthetic dimension, which refers to the ethical experience of cinema. The latter, in turn, can be analysed into three strands," (2018, p. 196).

The four dimensions are (a) to focus on ethics within cinematic representation, (b) the ethics *of* cinematic presentation, (c) the ethics of cinema as a medium symptomatic of broader cultural-historical or ideological perspectives, and (d) the aesthetic dimensions of cinema as a way of evoking ethical experience and thereby expressing ethical meaning (2018, p. 197-198).

Elements (a), (b) and (d) are particularly relevant, namely how a narrative frames thematic ideas, the moral code to which practitioners hold themselves during production (which will be explored further in Chapter 3) and the complex interweaving techniques which film uses to articulate ethical meaning which will be explored further in the second half of this chapter.

Sinnerbrink further delineates 'ethical experience' in the cinema into three strands: (1) the shared cinematic experience of engaging with the perspectives of other (fictional characters) depicted in complex situations, (2) where the viewer is moved to reflect ethically on what they are seeing through emotional engagement and moral sympathy (see Guyer 2018, Kneller 2018), and (3) responses to the cinematic experience brought about the aesthetic means, often by questioning the viewers beliefs, that can involve broadening the viewer's ethical horizons of meaning and deepening their moral understanding (2018, p. 198).

Whilst it is not necessary to interrogate these ideas in further depth here, it is clear that Sinnerbrink strongly promotes the theory that cinema is a meaningful vessel to present ethical ideas within a narrative, express ethical meaning, and have an impact on the viewer's beliefs through emotional engagement. This is both an affirmation of film's ability to argue philosophically and the principles that are the foundation of the central thesis.

2.2 How a Film Argues

> [T]he cinema is quite simply becoming a means of expression, just as all the other arts have been before it… After having been successively a fairground attraction, an amusement analogous to boulevard theatre, or a means of preserving the images of an era, it is gradually becoming a language. By language, I mean a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel. That is why I would like to call this new age of cinema the age of camera-style (camera-pen). This metaphor has a very precise sense. By it I mean that the cinema will gradually break free from the tyranny of what is visual, from the image for its own sake, from the immediate and concrete demands of the narrative, to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language.
>
> (Astruc, 1968, p. 19)

Film practitioner, critic and theorist, Alexandre Astruc was crucial to the creative renewal of cinema and provided the building blocks for the French New Wave with his essay *Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo* (1968). In the essay, Astruc calls for a personal approach to filmmaking where the camera is essentially the director's pen, or "la caméra-stylo", with the film able to communicate as nimbly, subtly and effectively as the written word.

Although often referred to as comprising five stages (development, pre-production, production, post-production and exhibition), the 'making' of a film is essentially like any other manufacturing procedure, in that it is a two-stage process comprising the creation of the plans followed by the production of the product. In this case, the plans are the screenplay, the completed film the product. For the purposes of this thesis, which is an account of the social practice overall, these two stages will be delineated to demonstrate their various different yet complementary and symbiotic tools of argumentation.

So what precisely is a screenplay and how is it conceptualized within the industry? In *A Philosophy of the Screenplay,* Ted Nannicelli defines a screenplay as a verbal object, one that is:

> …[I]ntended to repeat, modify, or repudiate the ways in which plot, characters, dialogue, shots, edits, sound effects, and/or other features have historically been suggested as constitutive elements of a film by prior a screenplay(s) or screenwriting practice (in accordance with recognizable and live purposes of that practice…)"
>
> (Nannicelli, 2013, p. 31)

Nannicelli considers the screenplay as a transient form over time, consistent with the practice of narrative feature filmmaking overall. His reference to the "constitutive elements of a film," will inevitably be incomplete, as a screenplay cannot include every constitutive element of a film as to do so would make it an impractically dense document at best. Screenplays operate much like digital compression; the elements are compressed into the document (with non-key areas left out altogether, for example, the colour of the wallpaper on the wall of a location) to be uncompressed at the other end by the director, various heads of department and the actors. It is these 'gaps' that are often the most interesting creative spaces but also potential areas of contention if exploited in different and conflicting ways.

Despite having a somewhat dual modern life as both a sellable intellectual property in itself as well as being a working industry document, a screenplay ordinarily contains few literary devices or written sleight-of-hand, as it can only describe what the reader is seeing and hearing at the time they are seeing and hearing it. As a series of instructions to cast and crew, it should have encoded all the foundational elements of the argument (such as character, plot, tone, setting, theme, point-of-view) which ideally will then be translated to the screen in an impactful way, as the 'gaps' will have been filled by a director in ways that strengthen the argument using singularly cinematic, rather than, literary, devices. This evolution is a natural and expected part of the filmmaking process.

If the narrative feature film has a different writer than director, it is integral that they both agree that the narrative feature film is making the same argument. Otherwise the film essentially has two conflicting authors and the argument breaks down in the ultimate telling of the story; the screenplay is not the film. Yet before the study can fully interrogate *how* films ultimately argue, it must first offer a more complete definition of cinematic argument than has

so far been set out, which will also include, only in the most general of senses, *what* films argue.

Cinematic Arguments

As has been previously discussed, the parameters of what constitutes an argument *per se* for the purposes of this thesis is less stringent than those that constitute a philosophical argument as debated by film-philosophers.

Although they contain cognitive content, cinematic arguments need not be, and indeed on the whole are not, philosophical arguments. They adhere to a minimalist conception of argument, as an *assertion supported by reasons to believe such assertion*. This very much embodies Sinnerbrink's contention that cinematic argument is the process of "aesthetic transformation" (2011, p. 131), provided that the transformation is a reason-responsive one; that is, aesthetic experience is not mere emotional manipulation, but opens up a receptivity to reasons. The proffered minimalist conception of argument meets the requirements described by Smith of the constituent elements of argument: "premises, a pattern of inference and a conclusion," (2006, p. 34). To Smith's concerns about the plethora of detail in feature films, it is this detail that constitutes both the argument and pattern of inference, as the case study will outline below. Furthermore, cinematic argument need not be intentional, as even if it is a rare occurrence, lack of intention does not have a necessary impact on the shape of material and it is the incognizant nature of the practice that this thesis hopes to establish. Success in achieving the internal goods might be often coincidental, but there are *bona fide* successes nonetheless. Cinematic arguments also do not require paraphrase, either be it via Livingston's (2006, p. 11) or the more common usage of the term; if a film is executed successfully, in that it has achieved the internal goods of the practice, the argument is wholly present in the film itself.

This is not to say that film excels in making certain types of argument, for instance the fully formed fictional world is a perfect vessel to be used as a *thought-experiment* that guides the viewer to the desired conclusion, "ineluctably, rather as the punch line of a joke leads the listener to its interpretation" (Carroll, 2006, p. 180). The cinematic screen is also particularly effective in providing a *counter-example* scenario to a universal proposition (Carroll, 2006, p. 175), as an argument of original conceptual points that do not require evidence (Carroll, 2006, p. 176), or even as Wartenberg's *illustration* of 'certain philosophical ideas' (2006, p.30).

However, the internal good of the practice is for the assertion to be 'worth having' and the method of argument to be 'worthwhile', terminology that needs further examination. As

noted above, in order to satisfactorily define these terms it is also necessary to give an account of *what* films argue.

What Films Argue

To remind ourselves of the central thesis, the 'internal good' of the practice of making mainstream narrative feature films is to move people in a worthwhile way to a conclusion that is worth having: not simply to make an argument, but to make an argument worth making and to make it with integrity.

So, what is a conclusion worth having? Sinnerbrink (2016, 2018) holds that films are vessels for aesthetic ethical experience, able to meaningfully challenge and potentially even change beliefs and opinions in the mind of the audience – therefore it might justifiably be expected that knowledge, or at least truth is a worthy goal. However, perhaps counter-intuitively, neither is a necessary bar when it comes to conclusions 'worth having'. This thesis is not suggesting an account of the practice as either contribution to global knowledge, nor elucidations of objective truth, just that the conclusion being argued has some intrinsic value. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, the conclusion in a cinematic argument needs merely to be edifying, so rather than knowledge and truth it is *plausibility* and *significance* that are the requirements. Implausible conclusions require fallacious argumentation; trivial conclusions are simply not 'worth having'.

There are plenty of worthwhile conclusions that generate worthwhile argument that ultimately are proved wrong. Until the 3rd Century BC almost every civilization believed the Earth was flat (Main, 2016). This conclusion was clearly edifying (both plausible and significant), and the arguments put forward were usually well-reasoned and certainly worthwhile – albeit all of them completely wrong. To give another example that is primarily aimed at children (and some parents), a film that carried the conclusion that 'children should eat their greens so they grow up big and strong', would not be considered edifying, as although plausible and significant, it is one that – if not self-evident from tacit knowledge – is something that children are likely to have already been told consistently, certainly in Western culture. It may be true and valuable, but not worth reminding people of because there is no value in its social or cultural re-enforcement.

To address how films argue in a 'worthwhile way', this is essentially how any argument is made with integrity, by moving the audience to the conclusion in a sincere, non-manipulative way using reason as opposed to using misleading claims or appeals to emotion – even if the conclusion is edifying, plausible and significant. This disqualifies such techniques

as ‘rhetorical argument’ as previously defined, which attempts to persuade others through the *appearance* of truth and may employ false reasoning without undermining its project. It, however, does not preclude unsound arguments, which are internally systematic and logically valid but start from a premise that is eventually discovered to be false.

Methods of Cinematic Argument

Cinematic argumentation that is presented in a worthwhile way is not a straightforward as it seems, as essentially cinematic technique *is* manipulation that appeals to emotion, with the latter being a key argumentative device. The question of how a film argues really becomes a question of how a film sincerely convinces us of a plausible, significant assertion. To convince us of the assertion a film must convince us in all other areas of story: it must convince us that the world is authentic, it must convince us that the characters are authentic, it must convince us that the situations are authentic and it must convince us that the resolution (or non-resolution) is authentic. If it fails in any of these factors, then the argument is lost. When engaging with any piece of art, audiences are expected to suspend disbelief to the form-relevant degree – in film terms, this means that genres such as comedy have to accommodate a higher suspension of disbelief than a domestic drama. It is expected that a conventional moviegoer will accept plot contrivances such as ‘the coincidence’ far more readily in the detective comedy *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* (Shadyac, 1994) than in the war drama *The Hurt Locker* (Bigelow, 2008), as well as the impossible over the improbable. As long as the logic of the story world is consistent, audiences are much more likely to suspend disbelief that an alien can fly (Superman) than the reputed top investigative reporter in Metropolis (Lois Lane) cannot recognize him when he wears spectacles.

Aristotelian Modes of Persuasion

It is worthy of note that when Aristotle is invoked in terms of screen storytelling, especially that of three-act structure, it is usually his *Poetics* that forms the basis of enquiry, even if it is often imperfectly quoted, understood and applied (Brenes, 2014). Chapter 5 will give an overview of the most relevant of those texts, as part of the investigation into dominant industry-facing literature. However, this study is primarily concerned with Aristotle’s theories of persuasion (as outlined below) and virtue (as will be interrogated in Chapter 3).

Like argument in any form, films use the three modes of persuasion as outlined in Aristotle’s *The “Art” of Rhetoric* in 322 B.C.E. (this study uses the 1982 translation by John Henry Freese). Even though Aristotle was referring to these modes when using the spoken

word, he was working in a time before moving pictures. It is worth considering an Aristotelian view of narrative feature film as he also saw persuasion as a form of demonstration, and narrative feature film is certainly a very efficient form of demonstration (1982, p.9).

The first book of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* advances the view that persuasion is achieved by the combination of three main elements (1982, p. 17):

Ethos: The source of the argument being credible.

Logos: The argument is internally logical (sometimes with appeal to facts and statistics); and

Pathos: The argument invokes the emotions and senses.

It is worthy of note that *ethos* is from the Greek word meaning "character", to mean the ideology that characterizes a community, and is also used to refer to the power of music to influence the listener, a tool used to great effect in cinema (see Chapter 6). The idea of the 'source' of the argument being credible can be interpreted in two equally valid ways. It can be taken to mean that the 'author' of the work is credible, be it the practitioners or the institution responsible for the film. Taking the example of Paul Thomas Anderson's drama *Phantom Thread* (2017), the Ethos could come from either Anderson's reputation or that of production company Annapurna Pictures, or distributor Focus Features, a subsidiary of NBC Universal. The alternate interpretation is that the world of the film itself is credible, convincing in terms of the aforementioned genre-consistent suspension of disbelief.

However, it is *pathos* that is a key power of cinematic argument. It is pathos that gives written drama more impact than simple intellectual debate, performed drama further impact over written drama, with film (and its ability to combine performance with other purely emotive elements such as music) perhaps providing the most impact of all. This equates to the moderate thesis as outlined by Cox and Levine and film's ability to emotionally engage:

> Just as we often believe what we want (or would like) to believe rather that what we have good reason to believe, we often believe things because we feel a certain way. Emotions influence belief, as do desires. This is a fact that cinema often exploits, and one that largely accounts for its ability to engage an audience.
>
> (Cox and Levine, 2012, p.5)

Reason and emotion overlap with the Aristotelian concepts of logos and pathos. Narrative feature films, especially when it comes to comparison with stories designed for the television or computer screen, trade in various manifestations of desire, especially sexual, sadistic and voyeuristic desire (Mulvey, 1975). Mainstream narrative feature films, be they Hollywood or Bollywood, trade in iterations of glamour both on and off the screen. It is why film stars, even 'character actors' are traditionally more handsome and beautiful than 'ordinary' non-actor-star individuals. The process has even become a well-worn verb, the 'Hollywoodization' of a story. This process starts with the screenplay: it is all encoded in the blueprint, and as patriarchal values currently dominate, it is in the descriptions and casting of female actors that it is most clear. There is now, as of 2020, even a twitter account run by American producer Ross Putman named '@femscriptintros,' that tweets the character descriptions of female characters to highlight the uniformity of this process. No matter how downtrodden or unusual-looking the character, she is always attractive: "JANE, 26, a freckled hottie in a powder blue skirt-suit," (Putman, 2019).

In a 'successful' film that argues in a 'worthwhile' fashion, the logos should be *augmented* and *supported* by the ethos, and appeals to pathos and desire. They are not to be distractions from either the conclusion or the argumentation. However, with so many elements to balance this is a difficult process which requires a mastery of the craft and a significant reason why most narrative feature films will fail to a more or lesser degree. Chapter 6 is an account of the ways a film can fail in its argumentation yet still achieve the external goods of the practice. A film can argue in an insincere way simply by emphasis, by too much reliance on desire or sentimentality to cover a minor or major flaw in logic or even to disguise false premises.

Case Study: Butch Cassidy & The Sundance Kid

The above methodologies can all be present in the screenplay, but this thesis is concerned only with completed works. Therefore, the best way to demonstrate the aesthetic transformation of argument into film argument is by recourse to finished films. The following is an initial illustration of how the key concepts are applied, with full case studies examined in Chapters 7 & 8 which include how the hermeneutic responds to Barthes' notion of *The Death of the Author* (1967).

The over-arching view from the film-philosophers so far examined in this chapter is the false notion that somehow theme and argument are separate from action, drama and comedy (Smith 2006, Falzon 2002), as if one exists and then the other is somehow inserted,

or one stops when the other begins. However, in mainstream narrative cinema, every moment, every image, every gesture, every sound constructs the argument; action *is* argument. As influential screenwriting mentor Linda Seger states:

> Writers can communicate theme through story choices that they make. Events have meaning, and they communicate what you believe about why things happen in life. Deciding that a character gets robbed and mugged because they happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time can communicate your idea that life is haphazard and nonsensical. Choosing characters that respond compassionately to each other can communicate that you believe the world is a loving and caring place. Showing characters whose lives continually meet and intersect may communicate your idea about fate and destiny.
>
> (Seger, 1994, p. 130)

We will examine the minutiae of dominant industry thinking in Chapter 5, but the received wisdom from Seger and other influential screenwriting mentors is that to isolate the key thematic element of an argument is a process of observing what idea is being consistently tested, almost on a scene-by-scene basis, by the film (McKee, 1998, p.118). The narrative feature film screenplay can be thought of as being split into two distinct streams that must be unified for the film to function correctly; the study will refer to them as the *Dramatic Stream* and the *Thematic Stream*.

As Chapter 5 outlines, most screenwriting 'how to' books tend to concentrate on the Dramatic Stream, the fundamentals of the 'Main Character/Goal/Conflict/ Resolution' paradigm simple to explain and comprehend. However, it is the Thematic Stream that governs the social practice. This stream contains the assertion, traditionally comprised of a central singular abstract concept and a standpoint to that concept. The film is then *wholly constructed* around the demonstrating of that assertion (even if the practitioner conceptualizes this in a different way, using different terminology) with every creative element unified in this goal. The entire scriptwriting process can begin with the assertion, but this is rare. Usually there is another inspiration to start the process (scenario, character, music, sequence, genre) but development and fine-tuning of the assertion can come at any time in the development process (Seger, 1994, p. 132).

The traditional tools of the screenwriter are *time, place, characters* and *events.* (In fact, Russian formalist Vladimir Propp (1968) suggested that all stories in any medium can be

made up of a combination of a total of seven character types and thirty-one story functions). The primary reader of the screenplay is an industry professional who is looking to draw out relevant material for their particular department: the actor is looking for indications of character and dialogue, the production designer is looking for clues as to physical setting and so forth.

It is the traditional tools of the director that constitute how the film is ultimately delivered to the audience. Cox and Levine note that:

> …[S]ome philosophers (for example, Iris Murdoch (1970) and Martha Nussbaum (1990)) think that philosophy… is more at home… in literature and the arts than it is among the philosophers… Film however has an even larger bag of tricks than novels. The camera takes us precisely to where the director wishes to take us, and a point of view can be further emphasized with sound or music. And films show us faces; they give full rein to our capacity to read faces and grasp the significance of gesture.
>
> (Cox and Levine, 2012, p. 11)

The director must create a myriad of distinctly cinematic moments, each of which must make precisely the right impact if the argument is to succeed. These moments may be intellectual, emotional, sensual or sexual. Using the case study of Michael Haneke's bleak drama *Amour* (2012), Sinnerbrink (2018) demonstrates that impact by emotional engagement can counter-intuitively include both emotional estrangement (invoking ambivalence, clashing emotional and evaluative responses that resist reconciliation or unification) and moral-cognitive dissonance (as opposed to unified emotional-cognitive understanding).

The tools that the director has overlap but differ from the screenwriter – the screenwriter can describe or indicate a shot, but it is a wholly different experience to read a description of a picture to *seeing* a picture. Directors always have to 'show,' not tell – a screenplay can indicate an emotion, but the film must make us experience it. As mentioned earlier, the screenplay delivers information, but can also be considered as a blueprint of 'gaps' that the director fills: if the script was an exhaustive list of instructions then the director would be superfluous, but the raw material requires creative shepherding to the screen. Much of the work the director does is intangible, creating thoughts, ideas and emotions in the mind of the audience, in addition to the more measurable elements of light and sound. Whereas the screenwriter has simply printed words on a page in which to communicate, the director has a profusion of medium-specific tools at their disposal. These approaches will be fully

interrogated in Chapter 5, but the most significant techniques include the strategic implementation of the size of shot, composition, blocking, lenses, camera movement, lighting, production design, palette, editing, transitional effects, sound design, casting and performance. Each in isolation are phenomenally powerful argumentative devices, and although non-verbal are capable of influencing the audience's opinion of a moment, scene and therefore entire argument; taken together they can be virtually irresistible.

In western *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (Hill, 1969), the Dramatic Stream of Main Character/Goal/Conflict could be stated as 'two bandits want to maintain their lifestyle but are prevented by the 'wild west' rapidly becoming developed'. The Thematic Stream could be stated as 'people need to evolve both who they are and how they fit into their community if they are to survive, even if they will not thrive'. This Thematic Stream is usually referred to in the professional industry literature as the 'controlling idea', (McKee, 1998, p.115) as it literally controls all creative elements in the screenplay and the eventual film. However, more fundamentally, it functions as the conclusion to an argument *to which all creative elements become devices to prove the conclusion*; this is creative unity, and if a film is successfully unified then the argument manifests through each element.

Analysing the film from an Aristotelian perspective, the ethos is provided by the fact that the film was written by William Goldman, directed by George Roy Hill and released by Twentieth Century Fox. Goldman had not yet achieved worldwide fame as the epitome of a screenwriter that had achieved both commercial and critical acclaim, but had already had modest success with a studio film *Masquerade* (Dearden, 1965), and Hill had previously directed Julie Andrews in the well-received *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (1967). Both were highly credible storytellers. The film world presented is also highly consistent and credible. Artistic licence is taken in terms of its 'Hollywoodization', but it is in line with genre conventions.

The story lays out reasons logically why Butch and Sundance have to change (most dominantly by showing the inevitability of social and societal change) using various techniques throughout the film, from the visual metaphor of the railroad bringing civilization to the 'wild west', to the dialogue with Butch, Sundance and their mutual friend Etta as they discuss their futures. The central values of the film are consistent; all characters who embrace change are rewarded, and all who reject it are punished, most critically the titular characters themselves. At one point in the narrative Butch and Sundance attempt to 'go straight' but find they neither have the authentic desire to do so, nor are they their best selves when attempting to play by their society's usual rules.

Pathos, perhaps cinema's most effective argumentative device, is provided by the presentation of the cinematic elements, the 'detail' that Smith (2006) has significant concerns about. This detail will also invoke not just the emotions, but the senses and desires in the audience. This presentation begins with the casting, in this case Paul Newman, Robert Redford and Katherine Ross. All are hugely attractive and charismatic individuals whose natural essence, played up for the screen, is to invite desire and empathy. This is further heightened by the use of camera and light, highlighting both their attractiveness (soft lighting) and giving the audience insight into the nuances of their feelings through the use of close-ups to make their eyes large and easy to read. If we truly care about these characters and become emotionally invested their journey, what happens to them will have impact on our beliefs. As the humanistic approach to teaching and learning demonstrates, we most effectively learn from those we like (Brooks, 2019). An individual look, gesture or intonation carries great power to make us like, hate or doubt a character – and each moment builds towards the conclusion that unless these men can change, they will die. However, the conclusion is more nuanced, and the film demonstrates this through a key moment when Sundance realizes he needs the adrenaline in order to remain the fastest shot in the west. It builds to the realization in both the characters and the audience that perhaps death is their best option; they might survive if they succeed in changing – but they will not thrive. This abundance of detail is required in order for us to understand and empathize with these men. The conclusion is essentially about immobility of innate nature, told through personal tragedy. When Butch and Sundance realize they can't change at the end of the second act, the scene is played as a death scene, even though their literal deaths don't take place until (just after) the final frame of the film.

On a 'well-constructed' film, the argument is always clear: what theme is consistently being tested (necessity for change), and what happens in the end (death through lack of change). It would be a fallacy to attempt to make the entire argument within each scene (such as in an Eisensteinian intellectual montage (Eisenstein, 1969), but each is an important building block required to convince the audience of the validity of the conclusion. In mainstream narrative cinema it is the ending that is decisive and delivers the ultimate conclusion, so narrative art forms that are ongoing are unable to function as arguments.

To evaluate whether or not *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* is a successful film requires a two-stage assessment of: (a) whether the conclusion is thought of as edifying (plausible and significant); and (b) the argument relies on reason with appeals to emotion, desire and the senses without reliance on misleading facts, sentimentality, titillation or

sensation. Using these criteria, the film is indeed successful in achieving the internal goods of the practice. Carroll's notion that films can only persuade using "an argument of original conceptual points that do not require evidence", (2006, p. 176) belies a further key strength (in addition to pathos) of mainstream narrative feature film's ability to argue effectively: it's ability to function as both the argument and the evidence for the argument simultaneously. As Carroll states, the film itself is the perfect case study for the argument it is making, and his contention that film is "evidentially challenged" as the evidence has been "cooked" (Carroll 2006, p. 176), may mean that films fail to argue convincingly by *philosophical* standards, but not by the internal goods of the social practice.

As has already been outlined, mainstream narrative feature films are not required to generate knowledge, present truth or inspire enlightenment. They simply have to convince, even if the argument is ultimately proved to be unsound. The evidence may have been "cooked", *but the practice itself is the practice of cooking it*, and although this may lower the epistemological value of the film, it is effective evidence nonetheless, be it cooked in a worthwhile or cynical way. It works, not by providing new empirical information (even if some audiences may regard it as such), but by reminding audiences of what is important, furnishing a case in point to elicit apt judgement.

2.3 Conclusion

> Maurice Nadeau [has claimed]… "If Descartes lived today, he would write novels." With all due respect to Nadeau, a Descartes of today would already have shut himself up in his bedroom with a 16mm camera and some film, and would be writing his philosophy on film: for his Discours de la Methode would today be of such a kind that only the cinema could express it satisfactorily.
>
> (Astruc, 1968, p. 19)

Although he was not speaking strictly about mainstream narrative feature film, Astruc believed in the ability of film to argue as effectively, if not more effectively than other forms of communication. This chapter has explored the current thinking behind cinema's relationship to argument from the strictest demands of philosophical argument, as well as interrogating how films argue in a cinematic context using Aristotle's three tenets of persuasion, what they attempt to argue, and how the new conceptual hermeneutic informed by film-as-argument can be applied.

The aim of this chapter was to defend the possibility of film argument, as a precursor of the defence of the necessity of film argument in successful mainstream narrative feature films. To that end, it has shown that there are serious and significant academic theses that support film as functional argument, be they bold, modest or moderate, with new branches of enquiry continually being developed (such as Sinnerbrink's notion of 'ethical cinema'). The chapter has established that although debate within the academy about film's capacity to argue focuses primarily on philosophical argument, the consensus is that films can argue, even if they do not always do so. Further, the chapter has demonstrated that if the parameters of what constitutes an argument *per se* are less stringent, such as this study's definition of *an assertion and reasons to believe an assertion*, the consensus of films' ability to argue is compelling.

Yet even if films can be judged to argue, it is not decisive in proving that the internal good of the practice of narrative feature filmmaking is to move the audience to a worthwhile conclusion in a worthwhile way. Chapter 3 lays out in more detail the conception of internal goods and how they specifically relate to mainstream narrative feature filmmaking, with Chapter 4 examining potential competing notions of those internal goods.

Chapter 3

The Practice: Goods, Virtues, Success & Agency

3.1 Internal Goods

As was stated in Chapter 1, the key research question of this thesis is "*What is the best way to characterize the current practice and tradition of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking from conception to delivery?"* As the primary goal of the study is to make a contribution, however incremental, to the improvement of the practice it takes a teleological approach to define the practice in terms of its constituent ends using MacIntyre's (1981) concepts of social practice and internal goods: the latter those aspects of the social practice that are valued for their own sake, not for the sake of external rewards such as wealth and reputation. The primary internal good of the practice of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking, the study suggests, is *argumentative success*. It is to move people in a worthwhile way to a conclusion that is worth having. Yet to fully defend this thesis, it is necessary to fully interrogate this concept of 'internal goods'.

In his seminal text *After Virtue* (1981), Alasdair MacIntyre is primarily concerned with discovering the key human virtues and the role they play in our lives and our self-understanding. He is aware that any human quality that motivates behaviour could be regarded as a virtue, depending on the social conventions of the particular culture to which that human being belongs. He examines the thought of three prominent thinkers on this topic: Aristotle, Homer and Benjamin Franklin.

Aristotle holds, rightly or wrongly, that humans must have an overall objective or final end or telos. The final end for humans, as Aristotle articulates in *Nicomachean Ethics*, is to achieve 'Eudaimonia' – a good life (2014, p2). This good life is achieved through the exercise of the virtues, which are, for Aristotle, excellent character traits. In fact, MacIntyre argues that Homer, Aristotle and Franklin each consider virtue to be a secondary concept only capable of being expressed within social and moral life:

> One of the features of the concept of a virtue which has emerged with some clarity from the argument so far is that it always requires for its application the acceptance of some prior account of certain features of social and moral life in terms of which it has

> to be defined and explained. So in the Homeric account the concept of a virtue is secondary to that of a social role, in Aristotle's account it is secondary to that of the good life for man conceived as the telos of human action and in Franklin's much later account it is secondary to that of utility.
>
> (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 186)

It is beyond the scope of this study to individually interrogate the validity of Aristotle's, Homer's and Franklin's separate conceptions of the virtues, save to note that MacIntyre uses the common denominator unifying each school of thought – that of virtue as a secondary concept – to pursue a core conception of a virtue. What becomes clear is that virtues are defined in terms of social practices; social practices are not defined in terms of the exercise of virtues. This requires a concept of social practice that is independent of the exercise of virtues. Virtues are traits that are *necessary* for practitioners to excel in a social practice – they are not definitional of what it is *to* excel at a social practice. This is where the concept of an 'internal good' becomes critical – it is how practitioners understand what it is to excel at a social practice.

To reiterate, the MacIntyreian concept of a social practice is:

> …[A]ny coherent and complex form of socially established human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended.
>
> (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 187)

So to qualify as a practice, not only must the practice be sufficiently complex and realize internal goods in attempting excellence, but it must involve a self-reflexive element; to engage in the social practice meaningfully is to consider the nature of the social practice itself with a view to evolving it.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, mainstream narrative filmmaking can be classified as a social practice in precisely the sense MacIntyre sets out: a complex form of socially established co-operative human activity that comprises many intricate production stages (classed broadly as development, pre-production, production and post-production), and one

that is constantly challenging the definition of itself and its core excellences. These key excellences are governed by reference to the internal goods of the practice that are enabled by the virtues of the screenwriter and director of the mainstream narrative feature film.

To interrogate the central thesis further, if the internal good of the practice of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking is to make an edifying argument with integrity, just what specific human virtues are necessary for the mainstream narrative feature filmmaking practitioner to hold?

3.2 The Virtues

MacIntyre believes there are three *universal* human virtues that the practitioner must hold if they are to achieve and comprehend any internal good in any form of social practice, "we have to accept as necessary components of any practice with internal goods and standards of excellence the virtues of justice, courage and honesty," (1981, p. 191).

MacIntyre makes a strong case for these virtues by appeal to the need for fair and functional relationships between those who participate in the practice (pp. 191-192). However, when it comes to the specifics of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking, further media-specific virtues are plausible. Based on my own reflective practice as a professional screenwriter and director, including observation and interaction with those practitioners who are generally well-regarded by their casts, crews, peers and audiences, the study makes the case below for three further mainstream feature film-specific virtues. For the practitioner to achieve the goods internal to the practice the virtues of *curiosity, 'creative compassion'* and *'creative generosity'* should be added. To clarify further, all virtues should not be mistaken for the skills required to make a 'successful' film. These are virtues that can be split into two broad categories, *regulatory* virtues and *motivational* virtues, and as a whole they are necessary to achieve goods internal to the practice but not sufficient in themselves. This makes the relevant set of virtues as follows:

<u>Regulatory (virtues that regulate action)</u>

COURAGE: So as to have the courage to tell the story (at the risk of harm).

HONESTY: So as to tell the story honestly (narrative honesty)

JUSTICE: So as to be fair in the telling of the story (narrative justice).
So as to be fair to one's colleagues in the social practice.
So as to be fair to oneself.

Motivational (virtues that inspire action)

CURIOSITY: So as to have the constant inspiration to explore and understand.

CREATIVE COMPASSION: So as to have empathy for all characters.

CREATIVE GENEROSITY: So as to want to share your story.

To give an example, a screenwriter or director who embodies these virtues may still make a failure of a film by any definition (artistic, commercial, failure of argumentation) due to further advanced craft skill-sets that they do not hold, such as the ability to get performances from actors (the director) or the ability to write convincing dialogue (the screenwriter). However, without being honest, having courage or a natural sense of justice, intrinsic curiosity for the world, having empathy for creative inventions and wanting to share the story for the benefit of others, the screenwriter or director is unlikely to be able recognize or achieve the goods internal to the practice.

3.3 Terrence Malick: A Case Study in Virtues & Success

To recap, the claim is that the six virtues of courage, honesty, justice, curiosity, creative compassion and creative generosity are *practically necessary* (but not sufficient) for the narrative feature film screenwriter or director to make a worthwhile argument in a worthwhile way. To explore and test this claim in more detail a case study is useful. The screenwriter and director Terrence Malick is a helpful candidate, as he was widely considered to be one of the finest screenwriters and directors of his generation, even though his output was miniscule in comparison to his peers. In recent times, his output has increased but his reputation has almost universally diminished (Leigh, 2017), and a close analysis both of some of his films and his reputation should bring some clarity to the way the virtues intersect with the internal goods of the practice.

Terrence Malick is an American screenwriter, director and producer (although he does not perform all three tasks on every project) originally from Illinois. Born in 1943, he was educated in Austin, Texas before graduating in Philosophy *Phi Beta Kappa* (which, incidentally means *"Love of learning is the guide of life")* from Harvard in 1965. He did graduate work as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University but left with a degree after a disagreement with a tutor regarding Wittgenstein (Solomons, 2011).

After working as a screenwriter (sometimes under the pseudonym *David Whitney*), Malick made two films in the 1970's as screenwriter and director: *Badlands* (1973) and *Days*

of Heaven (1978) both considered of such note that they are officially conserved in the American National Film Registry (National Film Registry, 2019).

Malick took a 20-year hiatus until *The Thin Red Line* (1998), then a seven-year break until *The New World* (2005). He then made four films in the next seven years: *The Tree of Life* (2011), *To the Wonder* (2012), *Knight of Cups* (2015) and *Song to Song* (2017). Whilst *Tree of Life* won Malick the Palme d'Or at Cannes, his latest three films have been so derided by both critics and the public that a now common debate is whether or not Malick should continue to make films (Debruge 2017, Rose 2017).

Malick is also often (but wrongly) called a recluse, as he does not do interviews nor promote his work in any way (Blackall, 2011). But even if he was the most open of social-media personalities, the caveat must be noted that this case study only speculates as to his virtues based on a close reading of his films, and therefore is not dealing with Malick per-se, but a conception-of-Malick as justifiably indicated by his body of work. The films that form the case study are, in order of production: *Badlands* (1973), *Days of Heaven* (1978), *The Tree of Life* (2011) and *Knight of Cups* (2015).

Inspired by the real-life murder spree of Charles Starkweather and Caril Ann Fugate in 1958, *Badlands* is the story of Holly (Sissy Spacek), a 15 year-old emotionally-disconnected girl and 25-year-old Kit (Martin Sheen), a handsome sociopath, as they cross America on the run after Kit kills Holly's father for not letting them be together. Comparisons are inevitably made to *Bonnie & Clyde* (1968), (Ebert, 2011), and the Quentin Tarantino-penned film *True Romance* (1993) is a clear homage to Malick's film (even down to a remarkably similar music score and theme).

The plot plays out thus: Set in 1959, the story is narrated in voice-over by Holly. When the audience meets her, she lives in a small South Dakota town of Fort Dupree with her sign-painter father (Warren Oates). Her mother died a long time before, and her relationship with her father is distant. One day Holly meets the charming Kit, who looks a lot like James Dean, whom Holly adores. The two have a connection, which on the surface looks to be romantic, if emotionally stilted. Holly's father wants Kit to stay away, so attempts to take away all of Holly's spare time and shoots her dog as a punishment. While Holly's father paints a sign, Kit attempts to convince him that the relationship is meaningful, and when he is rebuffed, enters Holly's house and shoots her father dead. Holly remains emotionally distant throughout the whole event.

Kit tells her she can call the police but he will suffer because of it. The couple then fake their joint suicide by burning down the house and go on the run, making their way

towards the ‘badlands’ of Montana. They build a tree house in some isolated woods and live there for a while before being discovered by three armed men. Apparently having some military training, Kit shoots them dead and they run, finding temporary refuge with Kit’s old friend Cato (Ramon Bieri).

When Cato tries to call for help, Kit shoots him. Cato doesn’t die instantly and the three of them have a ‘normal’ conversation whilst Cato lies on the bed dying. Kit then also shoots a teenage couple who arrive to visit Cato, although it is unclear whether or not they have been killed.

Kit and Holly are now very high-profile outlaws and are hunted across the Midwest. They stop at a mansion to replenish supplies and steal a car, but spare the lives of the rich owner of the house and the housemaid.

Holly becomes tired both of Kit and of life on the run. As their capture becomes inevitable she refuses to go with Kit. Kit leads the police on a final chase, final because he wants to get caught. He has an opportunity to get away but shoots his own tyre.

Kit surrenders peacefully and puts all his efforts into charming the police and armed forces that have been pursuing him. Initially they are insulting and dismissive, but eventually warm to him and there is a strong hint of admiration at his audacity. Kit seems genuinely fulfilled as he basks in their attention, fielding their questions and cracking jokes. Six months later Kit is executed, whilst Holly receives probation and marries her defence attorney's son.

Days of Heaven (1978) is set in America in 1916. Bill (Richard Gere) and Abby (Brooke Adams) are in a romantic relationship but pretend to be brother and sister to ‘stop people talking’. Linda (Linda Manz) is Bill’s little sister and she provides the narration for the film. Bill has a hot temper and flees from Chicago to Texas after assaulting the foreman at a steel mill where he worked as a labourer.

Along with dozens of others, the three of them are hired by a young, rich, dying farmer (Sam Shepard) for seasonal work in the fields. The farmer (he is not given a character name) falls in love with Abby, and Bill encourages her to marry him so they can inherit his money after he dies. Abby is torn but eventually agrees.

After the marriage Bill stays on as Abby's "brother". The farmer's Foreman (Robert J. Wilke) suspects their plan but is sent to a remote part of the farm by the Farmer after he voices his concerns.

The Farmer's health does not deteriorate as expected, and Abby finds herself falling in love with her husband. Bill takes the news with grace, but their obvious non-platonic body language leads the Farmer to realize Bill and Abby’s true relationship. After a swarm of

locusts attack the wheat fields, the Farmer lets his anger get the better of him and sets the fields on fire. After they are destroyed, he goes after Bill with a gun, but Bill kills him with a screwdriver, fleeing again with Abby and Linda. The Foreman and the police pursue and eventually Bill is killed by the police.

Abby inherits the farmer's money and leaves Linda at a boarding school, believing it is best for her. Abby leaves town on a train with soldiers departing for World War I. The film ends with Linda running away from school with a friend, with her voiceover telling the viewer that she hopes her friend will do well.

The Tree of Life (2011) is primarily set in 1950s Texas and is told through mainly the eyes of Jack. As a 1990s architect (played by Sean Penn) Jack fights an overwhelming existential angst, and this struggle with the meaning of life is intercut with key memories from his childhood (where he is played by Hunter McCracken) as well as more objective moments in the history of the universe and life on Earth.

The film starts with a quote from the Book of Job regarding the foundations of the Earth before seeing Jack's mother Mrs. O'Brien reflecting on the choice to pursue either a path of nature or a path of grace. In what looks to be the 1960s, Mrs. O'Brien receives a telegram informing her of the death of her son, R.L., at the age of nineteen. Mr. O'Brien is notified by telephone whilst at work.

In the 1990s, Jack apologizes on the phone to his father for something he said about his brother's death. Jack begins thinking about his life as wanders around large, modern buildings, and then the desert.

We see the universe come into existence, whilst the voice-over (which seems to be the young Jack) asks existential questions. We see evolution take place on Earth until we come to the dinosaurs – and perhaps the first ever act of compassion when a dinosaur decides not to kill and eat a vulnerable creature. An asteroid hits the Earth.

In what seems to be a typical Texan suburban neighbourhood, the O'Briens welcome Jack, their first child and then his two brothers. As an adolescent, Jack struggles with the paths of grace and nature, as well as his relationships with each parent. His mother is nurturing and calm, his father conflicted and authoritarian, bordering on abusive as he regularly loses control of his temper. Mr. O'Brien did not pursue his passion, the life of a musician, and is clearly frustrated by the more conventional life he chose, one that is not as successful as he would like.

One of Jack's friends drowns at the pool and another is burned and scarred in a house fire. He becomes angry with both parents: angry at his father for his bullying and his mother for tolerating it.

Mr. O'Brien has to spend a long time away on business and the boys enjoy uninterrupted time with their mother. Jack explores rebelliousness with his gang of friends with minor vandalism, and then trespasses into an attractive neighbour's empty house. He steals her nightgown. Confused with his responses, Jack throws it into the river. Mr. O'Brien returns home, not long before the plant where he works closes down and the family is forced to relocate to another town. Mr. O'Brien has his own epiphany and openly questions his own life choices in front of the boys and whether or not he has been a good enough person. He asks Jack for forgiveness for his behaviour.

In the 1990s, as adult Jack rides up a lift he has a vision. In it, he follows a young girl across a vast, desolate landscape. There is a wooden doorframe. Jack carefully walks through it. In what might be the end of the universe, the sun expands and then shrinks. Jack follows the girl and a young version of himself across the landscape, until on a beach he is reunited with his family and potentially everyone he has ever met or valued. Everyone is happy. Jack meets his dead brother R.L., bringing him to his mother and father. His parents say goodbye to R.L. Mrs. O'Brien looks to the sky and whispers that she is giving 'him' her son. After Jack's vision ends, a slight smile is just discernible as he makes his way out of the building.

Although not explained in the film itself, Knight of Cups (2015) takes its name from a Latin-suited tarot card, part of a group that tarot card readers term the 'Minor Arcana'. The Major Arcana are more significant in divination, with the Minor Arcana providing the subtleties. The Knight of Cups is an individual who is a bringer of ideas but one who is also constantly bored and needing constant stimulation. If the card is right-way-up, it represents change and the new (often romantic in nature), if upside-down it represents unreliability, fraud and false promises.

The film tells the contemporary story of Rick, a wildly successful screenwriter living in Los Angeles who seems to personify the Knight of Cups – creative but suffering from ennui, almost wholly disconnected. The film follows his odyssey around the familiar, decadent trappings of Los Angeles and Las Vegas (sumptuous but literally empty houses, beautiful female actors and models) as Rick attempts to find connection – with lovers past and present, with his father, his brother, his mother and his place in the world. He had another brother who has died, the cause unclear but it is the source of great tension in the family.

The film begins with a quote from (in fact the full title of) John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678): "The Pilgrim's Progress. From this World to That Which is to Come, Delivered Under the Similitude of a Dream". After the prologue, the film is divided into eight sections, each (apart from the final section) taking the name of a tarot card: *The Moon, The Hanged Man, The Hermit, Judgment, The Tower, The High Priestess, Death* and *Freedom*. Each section concerns one particular individual in Rick's life: in The Moon it's Della, an insightful if flaky young woman; in The Hanged Man it's Rick's destitute brother and broken father; in The Hermit, it's a rich playboy; in Judgment it's his Doctor ex-wife where the lack of a child seems to be a main contributing factor to the split; The Tower concerns an immaculate model, The High Priestess a knowing stripper and Death a married woman who may be carrying Rick's child. Freedom contains Isabel, a mystic innocent.

There is no narrative closure to Rick's journey. The final image of the film is the POV of a car as it travels fast down a deserted desert highway.

It is critical to examine the films in chronological order if the study is to assess the presence of the six virtues of the practitioner, as virtues are not static, and may develop or atrophy over time. The question thus needs a temporal element: *Do Malick's films demonstrate that he either holds or held those virtues practically necessary but not sufficient to make a worthwhile argument in a worthwhile way?*

We also cannot separate context from text when it comes to an examination of virtues. An artist creating work around the importance of sexual freedom in Australia is far less courageous than one creating the same work in Saudi Arabia.

Beginning with *Badlands*, an examination of the most popular films released in the USA in 1973 will give a good, if unavoidably general, sense of what Malick's contemporaries were working on, and what was palatable to the audiences of the time. According to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), the top grossing film of the year was *The Exorcist*, followed by *Westworld*, *American Graffiti*, *The Sting*, *Enter the Dragon*, *Paper Moon*, *The Holy Mountain*, *Papillon*, *Sssssss*, *The Wicker Man*, *Soylent Green*, *Serpico* and *Mean Streets*. With the exception of the overtly experimental *The Holy Mountain*, each of these films have very clearly delineated heroes and villains. *Mean Streets, Paper Moon, The Sting* and *Papillon* all have 'criminals' as their heroes but without exceptions each live by a strict code of ethics: the main characters may not be *lawful* but they are universally *moral*.

This sets *Badlands* apart. Both Kit and Holly are objectively *amoral*, their own personal code of ethics is both unlawful and confronting to those who live by conventional codes of Judeo-Christian social conduct (do not murder, do not steal, be compassionate etc.).

If this were a traditional tale, Kit and Holly would be punished by the events of the film, and the narrative is certainly shaped in a way familiar to audiences of the time. It has a Bonnie-and-Clyde shape: murderous-couple-on-the-run can't-run-fast-enough-and-get-their-bloody-comeuppance. The film *Bonnie and Clyde* was released five years earlier in 1968, and was such a success that, according to Peter Biskind (1998), it ushered in the first great independent film era.

Badlands confronts its audience by not providing the easy resolution of *Bonnie and Clyde.* It provides a non-violent but more disturbing end when Kit charms his captors and becomes at the very least a local celebrity held with begrudging respect. It is clear that the only time Kit looks genuinely happy is when he is captured, a person of note. He appears to take himself to have *won*; he has got what he wanted no matter how misguided his desire.

Malick gives the audience no easy answers or explanations as to why that desire exists, nothing that would provide audience with impression that they understand the character and motivations of either Kit or Holly. Neither character has an obvious reason for their actions, and even if they are dismissed as psychopaths, it is not the only thing that defines them, which again confronts likely audiences of the film. But is this merely audience-baiting?

Consider the virtues one by one. Does *Badlands* exhibit Malick's courage? Is it courageous of him to tell this particular story? As the study will examine in the next chapter, audience-baiting is an element of art but not obviously applicable here. Audience-baiting shocks for shock's sake, but here it appears that *Badlands* is attempting to tell a difficult truth rather than a comforting lie: that sometimes there is no satisfactory explanation for extreme amoral human behaviour, and furthermore, that extreme amoral behaviour may inspire not just notoriety but popularity.

Does the film demonstrate narrative honesty? David Mamet, in his discussions of endings, claims that it doesn't matter whether or not the ending is good or bad, happy or sad, it just must be the *right* ending. This right ending is defined by what Mamet refers to as the 'grain' of the creative piece. Every story has a natural 'grain', and as with planing a piece of wood, the artist has a choice of either planing with or against the grain. If you go against the grain, the wood is destroyed (Mamet, 1992, p. 66). While this is a rather under-theorised proposal and relies on a well-framed metaphor rather than philosophical explication, it is a useful starting point for considering the ending of *Badlands*. For Mamet, part of the skill of being an artist is to recognize the grain and to go with it. In *Badlands*, it is clear that this is achieved. Even though the film is superficially shaped like *Bonnie and Clyde*, it is no simple

couple-on-the-run story. The eerie voice-over, the hanging shots on nature and the dispassionate representation of the violence are all signifiers of this. If it closed with a conventional ending, it may make conservative elements of the audience happy, but would be, in Mamet's terminology, *wrong*. The film sets itself up to be challenging, to challenge conventional understanding of human motivation and evil, and to close with comforting ending – in which the moral order is satisfyingly reasserted – would be to go against the grain.

On this evidence, can Malick be judged to be just in his telling of the story? The concept of narrative justice goes beyond narrative honesty, in the same way that an individual is able to be honest but not fair. This can be illustrated in two ways. The first is to use selection, a tool most often attributed to the editor. A practitioner can be honest in that they show the truth of an event 'woman steals money' but by leaving out the event 'woman needs to pay for child's food' they are knowingly creating an unfair representation of her. Does Malick do this in *Badlands*? There seems to be much effort in telling the story in an uninflected way, that is to say less stylized guidance that would be allowable for the genre, allowing the viewer to make up their own mind on how to read the events in the film. Any selection process is not perfect, and criticism can always be levelled as you can never show everything, but the intention to give fair representation to all creative elements appears sincere. Context has to stop at some point (there are always further surrounding events and histories to any moment in time) but it is interesting that as his further work demonstrates, most notably *Tree of Life*, Malick attempts to put the highly personal into the widest of universal contexts. The second illustration of narrative fairness is not simply to refrain from misleading audiences about characters, but to not merely use them as a narrative tool; an obvious cipher or source of conflict. A character must feel authentic, guided by internal emotion and logic consistent with the character as established over the course of the narrative. In the above example, 'woman steals money' will be fair if this is consistent with the character, not simply a necessary plot point in a poorly designed story, or involves exposition that clearly is coming from the screenwriter or director which the character would never articulate. In this way, as much as the characters in *Badlands* may act counter-intuitively, they are always emotionally and logically consistent with their established traits.

To examine the other definitions of justice, being just to oneself and to one's colleagues, it is necessary to take examine the discourses surrounding the film. As Malick does not speak about his work, there is no evidence to contradict the former, but with regard to the latter, it appears that Malick had a problematic relationship with his crew. There was a high turnover of crew as most could not abide his working methods that included frequent

spontaneous decisions and changes-of-mind that were at odds with the methodical tradition of filmmaking and put the shoot far behind schedule. “People who've worked with Terry either love him or hate him,” said Spacek. "I love him.”” (Gilbey, 2008). To tangentially upset your crew is one thing, but is this a question of fairness? If you take the view that everyone is there to make the best film possible, and this means going behind schedule, then it is more a matter of convenience that fairness. A deliberate withholding of information, and a spontaneous adventitious working style, could be construed as unfair but not an insincere working method, no matter how antagonizing that may be to those used to conventional workflows.

With respect to the motivational virtues of curiosity and creative compassion, the subject matter and its atypical treatment seem to indicate an innate curiosity with human behaviour, and the way Malick presents Kit’s only true joyous moment without judgment, and even giving nuance to all minor characters, including the young couple unfortunate to have run into them, as well as the maid the mansion demonstrate an empathy for all characters.

Creative generosity is the final virtue: the desire to share a story one judges as worth sharing. An assessment of this desire is quite straightforward. At a Pixar masterclass I attended in Sydney in 2013, Matthew Luhn, former Lead Storyteller, explained that Pixar view the audience to any piece of art as a pyramid: the more conventional the storytelling, the wider the audience as everyone has the ability to interpret the work. As the work becomes less conventional, rarefied and obscure, the pyramid narrows, until at the top of pyramid is the smallest possible audience. By Pixar’s determination, an artist that makes artworks for the top of the pyramid is an artist making artworks for other artists. *Badlands*, by taking the shape of a genre film (in this case the crime drama) makes the film accessible to wide audience, which indicates strongly that his creative generosity is strong.

This quick analysis allows the study to answer the question in the affirmative: *Yes, Badlands does exhibit those virtues practically necessary but not sufficient to make a worthwhile argument in a worthwhile way.* It should be noted that this analysis is not of the argument of the film, merely the virtues that allow for a potentially successful argument. But *Badlands* was made in 1973. Has Malick continued to possess and exhibit these virtues?

Days of Heaven (1978) has many surface similarities with *Badlands*. A period story about a couple on the run after a murder (but now with a sister in tow who provides the ‘naive’ voiceover, the function Holly played in *Badlands*). Although present but undeveloped in *Badlands*, here there is much more foregrounding of nature in the design of the film, and how the characters are seemingly unable to see the beauty of nature around them. *Days of Heaven* is perhaps most famous for the fact that most of the exteriors were shot only during

the ‘magic hour’ – that time before the sun fully rises or fully sets where there is light but no source, giving an ethereal feel. This meant that the production could only shoot about two hours a day. Unlike with *Badlands*, this unconventional methodology was not met with resistance, but enthusiastic acceptance (after the success of *Badlands* it appears irritation with Malick’s workflow patterns had ceased). Film critic Roger Ebert comments that: “It is the wondering narrative voice that lingers beneath all of Terrence Malick’s films, sometimes unspoken: Human lives diminish beneath the overarching majesty of the world,” (Ebert, 2011).

Days of Heaven is a more obscure tale than *Badlands*. The genre conventions are upheld more strongly (Bill meets a bloody end) but the film does not settle on a main character and most scenes are particularly sparse, with unrealistically minimal dialogue, if any at all, and are quite short, which tends to undermine emotional connection of audiences with the characters. All the characters of *Days of Heaven* remain strangers to their audience.

It is clear that Malick is attempting to express a fundamental truth as he sees it about the connection between people and between people and nature. The idyllic landscape and the allusion to Heaven in the title strongly indicate this. However, his thematic ideas are harder to access and engage in than they were in *Badlands*.

Days of Heaven was released in 1978. Other popular films in the US in 1978 were *The Deer Hunter* (Cimino) and *Midnight Express* (Parker), both thematically confronting films. Does this context affect Malick’s creative courage? The answer can only be indeterminate: a soldier does not become less courageous because he has returned from war, but certainly has less opportunity to demonstrate it. With respect to honesty and justice, both seem to be present in *Days of Heaven* as the characters appear emotionally and logically consistent to their traits and no critical contexts are maliciously withheld. With regard to curiosity and creative compassion, Malick’s interest in the intersection of humanity and nature is again present and his empathy for all characters is clear.

From this the study can conclude that as of *Days of Heaven*, Malick filmmaking virtues are on ample display. Both *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven* were made in what could be called ‘Phase 1’ of Malick’s career. He did not make another film for 20 years. (‘Phase 2’ would be the films from *The Thin Red Line* (1998) and *The New World* (2005), both quite large in production scale and historical context (World War II in the former and the European colonial invasion of North America in the latter). ‘Phase 3’ begins with *The Tree of Life* (2011) and appears to end with *Song to Song* (2017). *A Hidden Life* (2019) is a return to the war canvas of *The Thin Red Line*, so may well start a move into ‘Phase 4’.

The question now posed is this: Did Malick maintain his filmmaking virtues when he entered into the third phase of his career?

The Tree of Life again shares similarities with both *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven*. Voice-over infuses the film (starting with a female voice-over but now shared amongst other characters). It shares many visual cues with *Badlands* (it could almost be set on the same street as Kitty's house) and much of it is reflective of Malick's time growing up in 1950's Texas. This clear autobiographical imprint is also present in the plotting of the film. Malick had a brother who played the guitar and killed himself at a young age. In one very real sense this is a personal autobiographical story about a man with a crisis of faith, Malick-as-artist working out his own eschatological concerns. However, as it is cross-cut with the origins of the universe, and perhaps the first ever moment of natural compassion (the dinosaur choosing not to kill the other vulnerable dinosaur) as well as a voice-over debate on the idea of grace versus nature, it attempts to become an exploration of not just faith and humanity but of evolution and empathy across all species. Unlike with *Badlands*, it does seem that here Malick really is attempting to provide the vastest of contexts, be it metaphysical rather than narrative context. There can be no doubt that this is hugely ambitious thematically (encompassing the destiny of humankind and its intrinsic connection to nature); structurally (non-linear); and narratively (juxtaposing a period personal story and dinosaurs/origins of the universe/internal character visions).

To think about the film in terms of the virtues, there is little indication that courage is lacking (by taking on such wide-ranging thematic ideas), nor honesty, justice or creative compassion. Malick's curiosity also appears intact (by attempting insight into so many areas) but it is his creative generosity that shows signs of faltering.

Taking the Pixar scale, Malick is progressing from telling stories near the bottom of the pyramid to the middle. *The Tree of Life* is may be far more thematically ambitious than *Badlands*, but it is also far less accessible. A practitioner who concentrates on unpopular topics knowing that this will limit the audience is not ungenerous if they are trying to genuinely attempting to communicate with that audience. However, placing *The Tree of Life* in the context of Malick's earlier work does betray an increasing proclivity for self-indulgence and obscurantism.

This brings us to a discussion of the 'worthwhile'. The study has been focusing on the virtues a practitioner needs (but is not sufficient to) move the audience to a *worthwhile* conclusion in a *worthwhile* way. But what is meant by worthwhile in each context?

The Tree of Life can be said to have a worthwhile conclusion (that 'the way of grace is our only hope for living a good (connected/unalienated) life'), but is not necessarily making it in a worthwhile way. The obscurity with which Malick tells his story, the diminishing of creative generosity as he does not appear to care if his ideas are being efficiently communicated, makes the construction of his argument less worthwhile. There can be many reasons for this approach, from the oblivious to the impatient to the exploitative (a film that manipulatively pulls on sentimental heartstrings to get its point across) but nevertheless each is equally problematic and works against the internal good of the practice.

The Tree of Life divided audiences and critics alike, but *Knight of Cups* (2015) reunited them but not in the way Malick perhaps would have wished. Almost universally derided, comments ranged from "Joyless, uninspired," (Bradshaw, 2015) to "Lamely prosaic," (Nayman, 2016). One of the most significant good reviews came from Matt Zoller Seitz from *rogerebert.com* (2016), who nevertheless did also have to admit that: "many viewers will find it impenetrable and intolerable".

Knight of Cups suffers both from text and context. Textually, the stream-of-consciousness narrative with no resolution is both confusing and unsatisfying and it would appear to the uncharitable viewer that Malick has become a self-parody. All cinematic techniques on display here appear to have become tropes to be used in a *make-your-own-Malick-film-kit* toolbox: the floating camera; the man in a desolate landscape looking lost; the voice-over asking spiritual/philosophical questions to no one in particular; the invitation to be in awe of nature; the 'dead third brother' narrative strand; the clearly autobiographical references (successful screenwriter in a crisis of faith). This lack of coherence and appearance of self-indulgence means that with *Knight of Cups* Malick has fallen foul of the internal goods of the practice; not only has he has not argued in a worthwhile way, the conclusion is opaque.

To frame this failure in terms of the virtues, in *Knight of Cups* Malick demonstrates little courage nor creative generosity: he is on well-worn story territory and tells it in an obscure way that will only appeal to a very select viewership; he may be attempting to explore an idea of a phenomenological cinema, an exclusively stream-of-consciousness cinema concerned primarily with first-person experience. In Pixar parlance, it is a film for those at the top of the pyramid. In fact, all indications imply that the film may not even be targeted at other artists, but merely at Malick himself.

In terms of justice, there also seems to be an issue with Malick being fair to his cast. As Thomas Lennon, a well-known comic actor cast in *Knight of Cups* reported:

> …[H]e only found out about the scene a few days before it was shot, and was given no information other than to dress as if he were going to a party in the Hollywood Hills. *"We're all standing there and Malick hands out these pieces of paper to all of us," Lennon said. "And the one he gave me said, 'There's no such thing as a fireproof wall.' And I ask, 'Is this something I'm supposed to say in the scene?' and he said, 'I don't know.'" Lennon learned, after talking to the director, that there was no script, just a phrase that might inspire him when cameras started rolling. "And then Malick goes, 'Would you like some more? Because I have a whole stack of these.' And I was like, 'I think I'm good," Lennon said."*
>
> (Adams, 2016)

This is far from respectful to the actors' process and craft. It is one thing to encourage improvisation, another to not allow an actor to prepare.

Malick held the virtues courage, honesty, justice, curiosity, creative compassion and creative generosity necessary but not sufficient to achieve the internal goods of the practice, but these have eroded over time, causing his latest work to fail. This is not a failure as defined by critical or audience reception nor financial profits, but purely in terms of the internal goods of the practice: Malick's later films begin to fail when they do not move the audience to a worthwhile conclusion in a worthwhile way, primarily through a failure to express creative generosity. The critical response of Malick's films has been used to give historical context, and a critic should be a good barometer of the accessibility of the argument presented by the film. As the furore surrounding the release of *Joker* (Phillips, 2019) reveals, critics evenly engage in debate both on the technical prowess of the film and the impact of the argument (Zacharek, 2019). Yet there is no necessary overlap between a narrative feature film's success with critics and in the marketplace, and success as defined by the internal goods of the practice. As the study will examine in Chapter 6, alternative conceptions of success rely on very different variables.

The virtues of the film practitioner and the internal goods of the film-as-social-practice have a natural complementary nature, one logically allows for the other. However, the relationship between the internal and external goods of film-as-social-practice interrelate in much more complex and, at times, problematic way.

3.4 External Goods

This is MacIntyre's definition of external goods:

…[W]hen achieved [external goods]… are always some individual's property and possession… External goods are therefore characteristically objects of competition in which there must be losers as well as winners. Internal goods are indeed the outcome of competition to excel, but it is characteristic of them that their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice.

(MacIntyre, 1981, p. 190)

MacIntyre is not saying that external goods are necessarily negative, he is simply delineating the difference between internal and external goods. A practitioner who is fixated on external goods is likely to – *but will not necessarily* – fall foul of the internal goods of the practice. For instance, a mainstream narrative film director may be wholly fixated on the external goods of fame and money – but if they are aware of the internal goods of the practice and believe that the way to achieve the external goods is by fulfilling the internal goods, then the two are not in conflict.

However, MacIntyre is less concerned with individual practitioners than with the institutions that make the practices possible. Here again is his outline of the inter-relationship between the two:

> Institutions are characteristically and necessarily concerned with what I have called external goods… they distribute money, power and status as reward… Indeed so intimate is the relationship of practices to institutions… that institutions and practices characteristically form a single causal order in which the ideals and the creativity of the practice are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution, in which the cooperative care for common goods of the practice is always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution. In this context, the essential function of the virtues is clear. Without them, without justice, courage and truthfulness, practices could not resist the corrupting power of institutions…
>
> (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 193)

It is worth noting that this is the way that MacIntyre justifies his choice of virtues necessary to achieve the internal goods for any social practice, as by his definition all social practices are enabled by some form of institution.

The relationship of a social practice to those institutions that both empower and obstruct it is a complex and problematic one. It is one thing to say that institutions have 'corrupting power' and wholly another to claim that they apply this power with any regularity. MacIntyre states that the creativity of the practice is always *vulnerable* to the institution but again, vulnerability does not necessarily imply automatic exploitation, however likely it may be.

In Chapter 1, the study laid out the basic structure of the institutions concerned with mainstream feature film production. Below is the exhaustive list of typical production entities (Bordwell, Thompson and Smith 2018, pp. 16-53, and Moore, 2019).

- The Production Company or Companies
  The company that oversees the physical production of a mainstream narrative feature film. Sometimes owned and run by a key producer and sometimes has its overhead bankrolled by a larger studio who has no official stake in the company.
- The Financing Company or Companies
  The company that supplies the finance for the film. On a typical mainstream feature film that is not wholly funded by a studio, this is usually a patchwork of half-a-dozen companies, some purely financial investors, others state television broadcasters or government agencies providing subsidies.
- The Bond Company
  Also known as a Completion Guarantor, an insurance company that for a significant premium guarantees to the Financing Company that the film will be completed on time and on budget. In order to guarantee this, they insist on approval for all key cast and crew. If the project goes over time or budget the company has the power to fire and replace everyone on set, including key cast, director and producers.
- The Distribution Company or Companies
  The company in each national territory that buys the film from the production company and sells the film to the audience via all exhibition platforms (such as cinema, streaming, DVD, free-to-air or subscription television, web, in-flight entertainment).

- The Marketing and Public Relations Agency or Agencies
  These companies work directly for the distributors in each territory to market and promote the film.
- The Exhibition Company or Companies
  Owners of the platform that ultimately shows the film to the audience (cinema chains, DVD rental stores, TV broadcasters, VoD (Video-on-Demand) services, download websites). Often each institution is different in each territory, but some, such as Netflix, are becoming one global institution.

With the exception of government agencies and bond companies, it must be noted that many of these companies can be owned by the same institution. If this institution produces significant amounts of content, it is usually referred to as a 'Studio'.

This is a significant number of institutions, but it is fair to ask how many are likely to function as a MacIntyrean 'corrupting influence' on the actual practice of making a mainstream narrative feature film. For instance, is the Marketing Agency, an institution far removed from the process of film production able to 'corrupt' the social practice of the mainstream narrative feature film?

Before concluding that fixation on external goods leads institutions automatically to corrupt the social practice, it is important to reconstruct how a film institution may typically influence the content of a mainstream narrative feature film. To look at this influence in approximate order of production:

The Production Company or Companies are responsible for getting films made, which typically means raising finance, putting together the creative production team, selling to the distributors and making sure the film is delivered. The Production Company typically owns the copyright in the film and only sells a licence to distribute to the distributors. They can have very direct influence on the creative direction of the film by their selection of screenwriter, director and other key creative elements. They are able to replace these key creatives or influence them as their direct employer. During the development stage, if the Production Company cannot raise finance due to, for example, a contentious plot point, they will ultimately ask for it to be changed. If the Company cannot sell the film due to elements present in the delivery cut, they can insist on reshoots. A high-profile example of this is Disney financing extensive reshoots on *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (Edwards, 2016) due to problems with the ending (Kit, 2016).

The Financing Company or Companies have varying degrees of power depending on the percentage of the budget they are supplying. Usually there is a lead financier (be it a studio or otherwise) and this gives them (usually contractually) ultimate creative control of the project. The other Companies contributing finance to the film will have what is referred to as 'consultation' rights: the facility to offer feedback without any facility to enforce those changes. Due to the arms-length nature of the connection between The Financing Company and the physical production, most of the influence is at either end of production: at the script, casting or delivery stage. Influence is likely (especially in discussions about key cast) as a return in investment is key and the higher profile the actors the more likely the film is guaranteed to see a return. Even if the Production Company does not wish for any changes the Financing Company will typically have the final say.

The Bond Company is very influential in terms of casting and crewing choices but if all goes well, they will have no further contact with the film or practitioners. The Bond Company, sometimes called a Completion Guarantor, has no interest in the *quality* of the production or how much money the film might make. They are paid a fee to provide a service, but their decisions can have far-reaching creative consequences. They are able to reject a director for being too inexperienced or insist on more experienced crew to support them. If the film is running behind schedule, they have the facility to fire everyone and re-cast and re-crew; however this is a rare circumstance.

The Distribution Company or Companies hold significant power over the practice. In many instances they are also a key financier of the project, and usually function as a *de facto* financier of a mainstream narrative feature film as the money they promise to pay on delivery of the film (referred to as a minimum guarantee or M.G.) is used to underwrite production loans. Even if the Distribution Company has had no involvement until the film is completed and presented to them for purchase, the institution can hold great power and creative influence (Lobato and Ryan, 2011). Ultimately, the Company can refuse delivery of the film, and therefore payment, unless changes they deem necessary to the film are made. A particularly illustrative example of this is the horror film *The Descent* (Marshall, 2005). The original cut of the film, and one that was shown to most audiences, involves a twist where initially it seems that the final living character has ultimately made it out of the cave, only for it to be revealed that she is still inside and will not survive (Emerson, 2006). The American distributor, Lionsgate, wanted a more optimistic ending, and with the director's blessing, *removed the final minute of the film*. The effect was successful in providing a 'happy' ending, but obviously had a significant impact on the argument the film was making.

The Marketing and Public Relations Agency or Agencies work for the distributors so their ability to effect a change to the social practice is minimal in the independent sector (where the Agencies are third party suppliers brought in on a project by project basis). However, in the cases where the Agency is a department of a studio that also financed and is distributing the film the influence is far greater, and in fact would be the department that leads the thinking as to not only what changes might need to be made (as in the Disney example) to a finished film, but also how a script should be developed (as in the Disney live-action remakes of its own classics such as *Cinderella* (Branagh, 2015) *The Lion King* (Favreau, 2019) and *Beauty and the Beast* (Condon, 2017). They may even contribute a view as to what underlying rights should be acquired allowing the production of mainstream narrative feature films (such as Time Warner and The *Harry Potter* franchise).

Finally, *The Exhibition Company or Companies* have the final say on what they are prepared to show to the audience. In terms of cinema, all cinema chains have bookers whose job it is to decide what films to show and on how many screens. If they do not think a film will sell tickets, the film will have no choice (no matter what the distributors wish to do) than to find another platform on which to screen. Each of the platforms operate in the same gatekeeping way, which also gives them significant indirect editorial power over the social practice. If all platforms reject a film, then the Production Company or Distributor would have no choice but to abandon, re-cut or become their own exhibitor (usually on the internet).

A subsection of the exhibition system that functions in a significantly different way is the film festival. Film festivals are not technically a platform in their own right, even though some film festivals now own channels or brands within other platforms (such as the Fantasia Film Festival on iTunes). Film festivals will typically only show a narrative feature film once or twice during the festival period, so their influence on the content is negligible. There are records of films being re-cut after bad audience reactions at a film festival screening (Wise, 2017) and before general release, but not in order to initially qualify for a film festival. Film festivals function as gatekeepers of official taste, not of audience access or potential financial return to the financiers. Typically, most film festival screenings cost the production money and are regarded as a marketing exercise to build interest in the film. That said, most film festivals have a ‘type’ of film they naturally prefer to program, especially those that are aimed at a specific niche (usually based on a genre of film, topic or community group) which can have an indirect effect on how a project is developed even if there is no direct communication between the ‘film’ and the festival.

As the above demonstrates, this represents a significant gauntlet of institutions for the mainstream-narrative-feature-film-as-social-practice to navigate, all of which carry significant power over the practice. The odds of a mainstream narrative feature film surviving this gauntlet untouched and intact are not all that high, which may be a contributing factor as to why so many films that reach exhibition ultimately fail to achieve the internal goods of the practice. It is also why for the purposes of this study that the examination ends at the point of first delivery to distributor. The thesis is not primarily concerned with how mainstream narrative feature films navigate the gauntlet of institutions, but what the internal goods of the social practice are as it concerns the two key practitioners of the social practice: screenwriter and director. At the point of first delivery, both screenwriter and director have completed their work and any further endeavours will be reactions to the (possibly corrupting) influence of the institutions which support the practice.

This separation between practitioner and institution is mostly clean, but not entirely so. The Production Company itself is an institution that potentially could be a corrupting influence, and requires further delineation, especially as to the producer's role in the construction of mainstream narrative feature film. This introduces the question of why producers are excluded from the class of 'filmmaking practitioner' for the purposes of this thesis.

3.5 Agency in Mainstream-film-as-social-practice

In Chapter 1, the study disqualified the role of 'producer' as a key practitioner of a mainstream narrative feature film as their skills base is quite different from that of either the screenwriter or director of a mainstream narrative feature film. However, the role of the producer is a fluid one, and it is important to re-examine this choice in light of the discussion of internal and external goods and institutions that enable the practice of filmmaking.

The key skills of a mainstream narrative feature film producer are based on their ability to (in rough production chronological order) recognize talent, structure and close a finance deal and navigate various stakeholders' often conflicting interests (which often, but not always, requires tact, diplomacy and highly strategic thinking). It is a useful bonus to have a strong sense of cinematic storytelling, but not a pre-requisite: having taste that is in line with the general film-consuming public will suffice equally, if not better, for the producer's role in film production.

In the typical employment structure of a mainstream narrative feature film (Bordwell, Thompson and Smith 2018, p. 17), even if the producer is 'independent' and developed the project with little or no film industry interference before raising the finance to make the film, they inevitably become the link between the production (director, cast and crew) and the financial interests (either their own or third party Production Company and/or the Financiers). This is much like an accounts manager in an advertising agency. In this way, the role of producer, although it is located physically alongside the practitioners of a mainstream narrative feature film, is culturally located within that of the institution(s) and therefore shares the priorities of these institutions.

This can problematic as, typically, the practitioners are primarily concerned with the internal goods of the practice (making a film worth watching, an argument worth making) and institutions are primarily concerned with realizing the external goods, which in terms of mainstream narrative feature films are money and prestige.

To take an example of a film studio that incorporates many of the other institutions heretofore discussed, film studios are typically publicly listed companies owned by other publicly listed companies and as such the CEO is under pressure to maximize profits and keep paying dividends to shareholders (Dick, 2001). It is also worth noting that, if 'running a film studio' qualified as a social practice (and this is in no way guaranteed) then the internal good of the social practice of 'studio-running' could also be in some concerned with generating finance, as the internal good of 'studio-running' would be very different from that of making a mainstream narrative feature film, and therein lies the problem that concerns MacIntyre. When it comes to cinema exhibitors, they are even further removed from the internal goods of the practice, regarding themselves in almost a different industry entirely, as 'sweet shops with screens' (Tuttle, 2009).

It is not that producers typically *do not wish* to make a film that expresses the internal goods of the practice (however they define them) but that the role necessarily entails a prioritization of external goods and requires little or no understanding or even conception of internal goods. Some producers may find themselves heavily internally conflicted about their role and their priorities, others will not. It is for these reasons that the producer is not considered a functioning practitioner for the purposes of this thesis.

Making a mainstream narrative feature film is a necessarily collaborate process, but how precisely does agency function, especially when the creative head (director) may have priorities in conflict with the business head (producer)?

The structure of a typical film production is a relatively simple one. The three roles that have the responsibility to deliver a film of 'quality' are the 'Creative Trinity' of producer, director and screenwriter. This may sound slightly odd but all other departments are primarily responsible not for the quality of the film overall, but only for their departments: the actor is responsible for their performance, the production designer on the sets, the focus-puller on keeping things in focus. These crewmembers may class themselves as storytellers, but they are operating at the micro-level and have no responsibility for the overall quality of the project. They are there to empower the director to tell the story.

In the same way, both the producer and the screenwriter, even though they are operating at the macro-level and are in a very real sense creative leaders, are also there to empower the director. The screenwriter, once the screenplay has been acquired by the producer, typically has no rights nor leverage in the production but can be consulted on their opinion, whether or not they have been engaged to complete rewrites. (The rewrite role requires a different skillset – such as writing to tight deadlines – that the original screenwriter may not possess and if so, is given to a different writer. As with the other head of departments, this 'rewrite' screenwriter then operates at the micro-level). However, like the institutions that have consultation rights, the screenwriter has no power to effect any change unless the director or the producer are in agreement with it.

As long as the producer and director define 'quality' in the same way as each other, and by extension, match institutional expectations, then the production runs smoothly. When the internal good of the practice (making a sincere meaningful argument) contradict the priorities of the producer/institutions (making money) significant compromises are made to the argument. The most common example of this, as previously discussed, is the 'happy ending'. A sad ending might be right for the argument, but if the institutions believe this mean less grosses, the coherency of the argument will likely be sacrificed for a happy ending.

It is worth noting that although this is the era of mainstream feature film as a 'director-led' medium, from its origins, film and feature film was considered a producer-led medium until *Cahiers du Cinema* championed the director-as-auteur in the 1950's (Truffaut, 1954). David O. Selznick, producer of *Gone With The Wind* (Fleming, 1939) considered himself the key creative of the work, and as he controlled and represented the finance of the film, his creative power was dominant. In fact, the film had a total of three directors, with George Cukor and Sam Wood joining Fleming (Andrew, 2019), demonstrating just how replaceable directors were in that era. Even today, the writer/producer model is commonplace, which is the only robust way a writer can maintain power over their material. In this model, the

director becomes, at best, the shared creative head of the production, very much working under the patronage of the writer/producer.

From these descriptions it could be argued that the producer is the true creative head of the production, as they control/represent the financiers and therefore could, if necessary, replace the director. However, the nature of the power of the producer as it relates to the power of the director is essentially a *de jure* power. Directors possess the relevant *de facto* power when it comes to translating a script to the screen. By the letter of the law (or, in this case, the contract) it may be true that the producer is the creative head, but in practice the director (thus empowered by the producer) has the relevant creative power. The director has been hired due to both their talent and efficiency, and to make the seemingly endless, large and small, creative decisions required on set and in post-production. The producer is a little more at arms-length to this process (sometimes producing more than one film simultaneously), so to get involved creatively is generally seen to be a failure on their part in their choice of director. The same logic applies to all other institutions. They can get involved creatively, but to do so demonstrates a failure on their part to choose the right personnel and involves them getting involved in process that is not a natural partner of their skills base. A current example of a producer and executive producer who has formalized the arms-length approach to mainstream narrative feature filmmaking is Megan Ellison. Ellison formed Annapurna Pictures to take a 'silicon valley' approach to filmmaking by investing in, or fully financing, original films by already prestigious directors (The Coen Brothers, Kathryn Bigelow, Paul Thomas Anderson), freeing them from the creative compromise often necessitated at the financing stage and allowing them creative flexibility during production (Grigoriadis, 2013).

In this way, it is possible to be a financially successful producer (and potentially successful in terms of the internal goods of the practice) with having no creative talent, input, agency or virtues associated with achieving the internal goods of the practice. It is possible to be a producer driven only by financial ambition (and not honesty, courage, justice, curiosity, creative compassion or creative generosity), only requiring the insight to realize the best way to make money is simply to empower the writer and director.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the concept of internal goods: a concept of MacIntyre's teleological definition of social practice independent of the exercise of the virtues but made possible by them. It has shown that although necessary, virtues are traits that are not definitional of what it is to excel at a social practice, nor are they sufficient to achieve it. Through a case study of a current film 'auteur', Terrence Malick, the study makes the case for six virtues (three regulatory non-media specific and three motivational media specific) and demonstrated how both virtues and internal goods are applied in practice and the associated professional implications. 'Success' of a mainstream narrative feature film has been further defined in terms of the internal goods of the practice, including what it means to be a 'worthwhile' film in terms of argument.

The chapter has also sought to demonstrate that external and internal goods do not necessarily have to be in a perpetual state of conflict, although the pressures of the institutions to focus on external goods (usually financial) in practice mean the institution becomes both a corrupting and enabling factor in the creation of mainstream narrative feature films. Finally, the chapter has defined more precisely why the role of 'producer' has been excluded from the definition of 'practitioner' as defined by this study: that although they may have high creative and story skill, that they may even be the *de jure* creative head of any particular mainstream narrative feature film, that as their power and influence of the work is always at arms length, knowledge and understanding of story is not *necessary* for a producer in the same way it is for a screenwriter or director. By definition, a producer also has to be, at least in part, focused on the external goods – so financial acumen is the fundamental element of their expertise.

Yet even if at this initial stage of the study it is accepted that mainstream narrative feature film is a social practice as MacIntyre defines it, capable of functional argument and governed by the notion of internal goods, the case has not yet been made as to why 'moving the audience in a worthwhile way to a worthwhile conclusion' is the most valid conception of those internal goods. In order to test the legitimacy of the thesis, the next stage therefore is to interrogate other competing, and in all cases far more prevalent, theories of the internal goods of mainstream feature filmmaking to assess their respective credibility.

Chapter Four

Alternate Conceptions of Internal Goods

4.1 Popular conceptions

Even though they are unlikely to be specifically named or conceptualized as such, the internal and external goods of the practice of making mainstream narrative feature films are regularly referenced by both mainstream industry practitioners and commentators. Be it a film journalist, critic, academic, screenwriter, director or producer, whenever an attempt is made to universalize *'what filmmakers are trying to do'*, or the more ontologically-framed *'what filmmaking is'*, the discussion is always to some degree an examination of internal and/or external goods of the social practice filmmaking. This chapter examines the three most prevalent conceptions commonly articulated in discussions on the nature and goals of mainstream narrative filmmaking.

4.2 Just Entertainment

This is perhaps the most dominant and pervasive conception of the social practice of mainstream narrative filmmaking. It recalls the quote most famously attributed to Sam Goldwyn (via a third party to a journalist) that: *"Pictures are for entertainment, messages should be delivered by Western Union,"* (Westein, 1940).

The quote is a direct denial of the principal claim of this thesis. To conceptualize it in the terms the study has set out, it claims that the internal good of the practice of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking is to *just entertain*; to simply provide amusement and enjoyment. This is all that filmmakers should attempt to do, and when it is achieved, they may deem themselves successful. No matter if the subject matter is dishonest, divisive and destructive, as long as the audience is diverted in a pleasurable way, the internal good of the practice has been satisfied.

To interrogate this claim further, it is critical to first clarify precisely what is meant by 'entertainment'. Most industry practitioners are likely to have in mind the conventional dictionary definition of the word 'entertainment,' according to which a piece of entertainment is something designed to provoke delight or amusement. The Macmillan Dictionary defines

'Entertainment' simply as "performances that people enjoy," (Macmillan Dictionary, 2019). Richard Dyer, in his book *Only Entertainment* (1992), attempts to define 'entertainment' more precisely. He defines it as:

> …a type of performance produced for profit, performed before a generalized audience (the 'public'), by a trained, paid group who do nothing else but produce performances which have the sole (conscious) aim of providing pleasure.
>
> (Dyer, 1992, p. 19)

This definition aims to be more specific by bringing in ideas of business, audience, training, exclusivity and intention (but leaving out all non-performance modes of entertainment such as the written word). Perhaps a more intuitively satisfactory definition of entertainment is one that accommodates the immediacy of the reaction it inspires. Thus: 'entertainment is a type of performance or artwork that triggers amusement or joy *that the audience is aware of at the time of experiencing the performance or artwork'*. Where an audience is entirely unaware of their enjoyment, they have not been entertained. Even if, on reflection, they realise the performance or artwork viewed has merit or benefit, they ought not to claim they were 'entertained'. They may have been interested or absorbed, or conversely resistant and distressed at the time of viewing only to come to a different conclusion once other internal processes have taken place – but ultimately the viewing was not an *entertaining* experience.

Both Dyer's definition (a prevalent view) and Goldwyn's maxim contain an implicit construction of the idea of entertainment that attempts to diminish both its significance and its influence: the idea that entertainment is solely about pleasure-giving.

The prevalence of the conception of mainstream narrative feature film as merely entertainment can in part be attributed to the fact that it serves both the purposes of the *promoters* and the *detractors* of film. For the promoters of film (such as the practitioners and institutions themselves) it is a useful articulation of the practice as it absolves the industry of social or cultural responsibility. This line of argument is most explicitly spelled out when the industry comes under attack by various media and cultural commentators for its potential influence on real-world violence. In the early 1980s this occurred with the rise of 'video-nasty' VHS rentals, and then a decade later with *Child's Play 3* (Bender, 1991), with the film being quoted in court by the child defendants in a child murder case in the UK (Morrison, 2003).

In these cases, the defence of film as 'just entertainment' has real-world stakes and consequences. Currently in the US, UK and Australia the film industry is self-regulating. This means the industry bodies responsible for classifying films are funded by the industry itself, with little or no government involvement. If more weight were given to the influence of film, more regulation would likely follow.

The detractors of mainstream narrative feature film consist of individuals and institutions that believe film is an inferior art form compared to other modes of creative expression. Again, this belief does not exist purely in the space of theoretical thought and has significant real-world implications. In Australia and the UK, film industries are heavily supported by pubic arts funding, as are most other conventional performing arts. It is unlikely that any meaningful arts industries would survive without such governmental support, yet arts funding is finite and industries compete for their respective share. This creates an inevitable political situation where each art form must justify its relevance and significance to the culture at the direct fiscal expense of the other forms. Feature film is undeniably mass entertainment, so the 'just entertainment' narrative suits other art forms that can position themselves, despite their smaller audiences, as providers of a more significant cultural experience. These tend to be battles between what has been traditionally regarded as high and low culture, and since both proponents and detractors of mainstream narrative film tend to push the same low-cultural conception of the practice, the conception has widespread currency. However, it is a highly flawed conception for a variety of reasons.

This is not to deny the significance of entertainment in mainstream filmmaking practice. It would be false to state that films have nothing to do with entertainment, in the same way it would be false to state that chess-playing has nothing to do with entertainment. Entertainment is a key element in the practice of mainstream narrative filmmaking, but it is not foundational, and therefore not the internal good of the practice.

To demonstrate this requires a re-examination the central thesis: that the internal good of making mainstream narrative feature films is to move the audience to a worthwhile conclusion in a worthwhile way. 'Worthwhile' is the crucial concept in this context. As pointed out in the discussion of Terrence Malick in Chapter 3, a worthwhile argument is one worth making – an edifying argument. Making an argument in a worthwhile way invokes the virtues of honesty, courage, justice, creative generosity and compassion. It invokes a methodology whereby a screenwriter and director would not choose to manipulate an audience dishonestly, even if it brings them to a conclusion that they believe to be just. Now, could the concept of entertainment be included the thesis' conception of the worthwhile?

Robert McKee, a best-selling industry screenwriting 'guru' whose ideas the study will interrogate in further detail in the following chapter, certainly believes so, "…all fine films, novels and plays, through all the shades of the comic and tragic, entertain when they give the audience a fresh model of life empowered with an affective meaning," (McKee, 1998, p. 12). The idea also has support from a less likely source: producer of action film blockbusters such as *Lethal Weapon* (Donner, 1987) and *Die Hard* (McTiernan, 1988), Joel Silver. Quoted in *Cinema Entertainment: Essays on Audiences, Films and Film Makers* (Lovell & Sergi, 2009), Silver comments:

> Why do you perceive *Lethal Weapon* as a lesser movie? Why is it lesser than something else – because it doesn't have a message? The message is entertainment, that's what our movies are about, entertainment. But they are also socially conscious films…
>
> (Lovell & Sergi, 2009, p. 95)

The answer is that it is certainly possible to view entertainment as a worthwhile endeavour, even part of worthwhile filmic storytelling – even a *desired* part of filmic storytelling – yet it is ultimately not a *necessary* part.

This is shown by various well-known mainstream narrative feature films that have been embraced by academics, critics and audiences and have had a strong cultural impact, but are not 'entertaining'. One of the biggest successes of 1993 was *Schindlers List* (Spielberg, 1993), the story an industrialist and war profiteer, Oskar Schindler, who had a change of heart and used his profits to rescue Jews destined for the death camps. It is an undeniably confronting and brutal film. Its aim is not to generate pleasure in an audience, but to move and edify them. It is an absorbing, engaging and interesting film certainly; but not one that seeks to delight its audience. Using the definition above, it is a film that can be appreciated, revered and understood to have had a positive impact on the viewer overall, but not one that is designed to bring joy at the time of viewing. *Amour* (Haneke, 2012) is another such film, an anti-sentimental drama about age, suffering commitment and involuntary euthanasia.

On the other end of the filmmaking spectrum, to demonstrate the second reason the 'just entertainment' narrative is disingenuous, it is useful to bring in two genres of narrative feature film: one that sits on the fringes of the scope of this study, another that is outright excluded by the 'deemed releasable' section of the definition of a mainstream narrative feature film: exploitation and pornographic films.

The full definition of a mainstream narrative feature film for this study is one that is a fictional story that runs between 65-300 minutes where a series of events unfold usually with obvious causal connections and typically with the same group of characters, intended to be seen in one sitting requiring continuous attention from the audience and deemed releasable to the general public by current established feature film distribution companies (both multiplex and art-house).

This is deliberately a very wide definition of mainstream narrative feature films, but puts exploitation on the borderline of the definition and pornography beyond its scope as pornographic films are usually not releasable to the general public by current established multiplex and art-house feature film distribution companies.

The definition of both genres is somewhat fluid but *Rolling Stone* magazine provides a good working general definition of exploitation films as ones that are "tawdry exercises in catering to audiences' primal urges," (Fear, Geist, Grierson, Grow & Hynes, 2015). Famous examples of this genre, which had it's heyday in the 1970's pre-VHS era, were films such as the women-in-prison film *Big Bird Cage* (Hill, 1972) and violent crime thriller *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (Peebles, 1971), the latter of which belongs to the subcategory of Blaxploitation, exploitation films featuring mainly African-American casts. Exploitation films clearly prioritize sensationalist and extreme renditions of sex, violence and often sexual violence over all other artistic considerations. This is of course a highly subjective area, but often the title and marketing of the films themselves give a strong indicator as to creative priority. A film entitled 'Big Bird Cage' with half-naked females on the poster is likely to be an exploitation picture, although this is by no means a conclusive test as the typical film practitioner has no control over how a film is marketed.

Contemporary filmmakers such as Quentin Tarantino were so influenced by what they termed 'Grindhouse' films ('Grindhouse' was the term used to describe a cinema that showed mostly exploitation films) that he, along with fellow Miramax filmmaker Robert Rodriguez, made two pastiche exploitation films in 2007 to be released as a double-feature under the joint name of 'Grindhouse', although they were also released separately as *Death Proof* (Tarantino, 2007) and *Planet Terror* (Rodriguez, 2007). These 'modern' exploitation films should not be confused with the traditional exploitation films as they are postmodern, self-referential works that in no way are as extreme in their treatment of sex and violence as their original referents, and therefore meet the 'deemed releasable' clause in the definition of mainstream narrative feature films.

An official, global definition of pornographic narrative feature films does not exist, and in fact the definition of what is pornographic in any media is delegated to the courts under obscenity laws. The Australian Classification Board (ACB) has a specific X18+ classification that is "a special and legally restricted category which contains only sexually explicit content. That is, material which shows actual sexual intercourse and other sexual activity between consenting adults," (Australian Classification Board, 2019). Like exploitation films, pornographic narrative feature films can be defined as prioritizing scenes of actual sexual intercourse over all other artistic considerations. These films are only deemed releasable by specialist, non-mainstream film distributors.

Exploitation and pornographic films are relevant here as they are both narrative feature films that place the concept of 'entertainment' of the audience front-and-centre of the cinematic experience. Both genres aim to bring amusement and joy to the viewer, be it fetishistic or more conventionally sexual. However, the terms 'pornographer' and 'exploitation filmmaker' are pejorative terms. It would be highly unlikely that anyone inspired by the magic of cinema to become a practitioner aspires, one day, to be a pornographer.

If the internal good of mainstream narrative feature films was simply to entertain, then pornographers and exploitation filmmakers would not be seen as separate to the mainstream film culture. This indicates that something else is at work within the tradition, which is more than simply bringing delight to an audience.

This leads to a third rebuttal to the 'just entertainment' conception: put simply, there are far easier ways to entertain than making often hugely expensive and complex narrative feature films. If an individual wishes to entertain an audience they can tell a joke. They can be a magician, an illusionist an equestrian in a circus. They can write a short story, a novella or a novel that just requires themselves and perhaps an editor. In the world of moving pictures, they don't have to go so far as exploitation or pornography, instead making cat videos which routinely get millions of hits on video sharing sites, although perhaps admittedly, not for ninety uninterrupted minutes. These are all more straightforward ways to entertain, so if the attraction, the desire, the vocation is to be a mainstream narrative feature film storyteller, then there is something else at work.

Finally, film industry lobbyists undermine the 'just entertainment' conception as a matter of policy. National screen bodies such as Screen Australia or the British Film Institute give the global 'film industry' something of a split-personality: as the study has noted, when it comes to the impact specifically of violence on screen on the public, the influence of

narrative feature film is argued to be negligible by all stakeholders; when it comes to public funding the cultural impact of the form is demonstrated to be substantial. In fact, a 2011 Screen Australia report highlights the fact that 79 percent of the Australian public agreed that Australian screen stories are vital for contributing to their sense of Australian national identity (Screen Australia, 2011).

4.3 Just telling stories

A second popular conception of the internal good of the practice, is what on the surface seems to be another attempt to minimize the cultural impact of the practice by reducing the complexity of not simply narrative filmic practice, but the practice of all storytellers in all media. This can be called the *"we're storytellers: we just tell stories"* approach.

"We just tell stories" is a particularly common phrase amongst narrative feature film practitioners and is used in a variety of contexts. It is not always used defensively to close down further thought or investigation. Sometimes, as in the case of Oscar-winning screenwriter and director Robert Zemekis (*Forrest Gump*, 1994), it is used to conflate the writer/director roles. As Zemekis puts it: "this idea of a director and a writer is only created by the unions and the guilds, because we're both just storytellers and we're making this film as a collaborative thing," (Mellor, 2015). Other times, such as in the case of screenwriter and director Darren Aronofsky, it is used to highlight the visual element of the medium. Aronofsky says "we're not just storytellers, we're visual storytellers," (Aronofsky, 2015). The claim is also made in a reductive sense. For example, the Australian actor, screenwriter and director Mel Gibson claims "we're all just storytellers, right?" (Belloni and Galloway, 2016).

Taken at face value, the claim that *'storytellers just tell stories'* is so reductive it does not appear to even qualify as an alternative conception of the internal good of the practice. It reads simply as a tautology. Nonetheless, the claim can be brought into conflict with the film as argument thesis the study defends. Discussing this issue will allow the study to position the central thesis within wider theories of narratology, theories that are not necessarily restricted to mainstream narrative feature films.

First these terms need qualifying: namely what do mean by 'stories' and 'storytelling'? 'Story' is a particularly fluid term. As with much terminology used in the creative industries (industries that have only limited technical jargon inaccessible to the general public) there are ordinary language, industrial and academic usages that diverge significantly. The Oxford English Dictionary gives two relevant definitions for 'story'. The

first is ‘an account of imaginary or real people and events told for entertainment,’ the second, ‘a plot or storyline’. So, to the common observer, the terms ‘story’, ‘plot’ and ‘storyline’ are all synonymous (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989).

The academic discipline of narratology offers much more precise definitions for these terms, but they sometimes conflict with their ordinary language usage, especially when it comes to the distinction between ‘story’ and ‘plot.’ Jonathan Culler (2001) goes so far to state that narratology is:

> [U]nited in the recognition that narrative theory requires a distinction between "story," a sequence of actions or events conceived as independent of their manifestation in discourse, and "discourse," the discursive presentation or narration of events.
>
> (Culler, 2001, p. 189)

As with many theories concerned with story and performance, the origins of narratology can be traced back to Aristotle’s *Poetics* (Halliwell and Aristotle, 1998). A collection of early twentieth-century Russian theorists known collectively as the Russian formalists created the discipline. Vladimir Propp is perhaps the most prominent member of the group. It must be noted that Russian formalists never came to a consensus other than over that fact that poetic and practical language were distinct entities worthy of theorisation.

Narratology is founded on the distinctions between ‘story’ and ‘storytelling’. In fact, *Narrative*, the official journal of the International Society for the Study of Narrative, is specifically interested in the powers and limits of story-discourse distinction (Narrative, 2019). Two key concepts in narratology are those of the fabula and the syuzhet. These terms are also somewhat fluid, so for clarity this study will use Bordwell’s definitions:

> These two terms have been used in several ways, but the most plausible way, it seemed to me then and seems still, is to see fabula as the chronological-causal string of events that may be presented by the syuzhet, the configuration of events in the narrative text as we have it.
>
> (Bordwell, 2011)

Therefore for narratologists ‘story’ is fabula and ‘storytelling’ is syuzhet. Another synonym narratologists use for storytelling is ‘narrative’ although this is also used by the casual user to mean ‘story’, ‘storytelling’ and ‘plot.’ (And note that it is again a different and more specific

definition of the term ‘narrative’ than is used in this thesis when it is used to define ‘mainstream narrative feature films’).

In an important sense, a ‘story’ is something that can never be reached. Once there is an attempt to *specify* it, it is not story but storytelling, syuzhet and narrative. Story is an abstract object in logical space; only a representation of the story can be given, not the story itself, communicated via the encoding process of the storytelling. However, as Bordwell points out (2011), the reconstituting of the story in the head of the audience member during/after the telling is highly imperfect.

To return momentarily to the alternative conception of the practice of filmmaking as simply a matter of telling stories – it is now possible to distinguish two versions, depending on the agent making the claim. A practitioner, professional or otherwise, with no knowledge of narrative theory will still be able to claim the general ‘we’re storytellers, we just tell stories,’ whereas the narratologist would be claiming the more specific ‘we are fabula-tellers, we just present narrative”.

However, having its origins in linguistic study, narratology is by no means the only approach to an investigation of ‘story’. Another branch of investigation and analysis is that of comparative mythology exemplified by Joseph Campbell. In his major work *Hero of a Thousand Faces* (2004), Campbell compares myths from various cultures and historical periods in order to assess similarities or points of difference. Unlike the more limited scope of narratology, comparative mythology allows for an attempt to understand why human beings tell stories (or to use the narratological terms, why human beings narrate fabulas).

In his book, *Into the Woods: A Five Act Journey into Story* (2015) John Yorke takes both a narratological and comparative approach to storytelling across most popular forms although, being the former head of Channel Four Drama and Controller of BBC Drama Production in the UK, he defaults mainly to film and television. He posits seven different and distinct reasons as to why human beings tell stories:

1. *The Societal Reason*: storytelling is at some level about learning and thus the story is a blueprint for human survival. If societies survive by adaptation, rejecting orthodoxy and embracing change then by use of archetype stories are a codification of this process: “a map that encourages us to rid ourselves of societal and psychological repression,” (Yorke, 2015, p. 205).

2. *The Rehearsal Reason*: “Stories allow us to understand and navigate a strange and alien world… By rehearsing situations… in fictional form we grow more adept at understanding, coping with and resolving them in real life too,” (Yorke, 2015, p. 206).

3. *The Healing Reason:* “It’s possible to feed any flaw into the archetype and resolve it during the course of a story, so clearly at some level stories offer a model for overcoming faults – a paradigm, if you like, for healing,” (Yorke, 2015, p. 206).

4. *The Information Retrieval Reason:* Here Yorke quotes Nassim Nicholas Taleb, a scholar who specializes in randomness and risk analysis, “The more orderly, less random, patterned and narratized a series of words or symbols, the easier it is to store that series in one’s mind”. Essentially, the story becomes an epistemic database (cited in Yorke, 2015, p. 207).

5. *The Panacea Reason:* Stories to provide hope. Yorke states that “Such an addition is an extreme form of making order out of chaos… It makes reality palatable and digestible – it gives it meaning”. (Yorke, 2015, p. 207)

6. *The Procreation Reason:* Yorke sites the sheer prevalence of stories that “end in sexual union and/or its symbolic manifestation in marriage,” indicate a function to “provide a template for healthy procreation,” (Yorke, 2015, p. 207).

7. *The Psychological Reason:* Based more specifically on Jungian psychology, this reason is yet another ‘how to’ guide for the human condition. This states that humans have to be psychologically balanced in order to achieve fulfilment: “Certainly the conflict between ego-driven desire and the deeper flaw-ridden id or need is at the heart of the archetype, and it is this that suggests Jung may offer us one of the best explanations for story… To Jung, mental health lay in balancing the contradictory elements within… an individual integrating wisdom from a mentor, femininity/masculinity from a love interest and missing flaws from an antagonist,” (Yorke, 2015, p. 209).

It must be stated that Yorke’s primary focus is to defend his thesis that five-act structure is the ‘true’ structure of storytelling – not the dominant three-act paradigm – and he examines the ‘why’ of storytelling in order to expose an explanation for this dominant shape. Although he uses the caveat that “Anyone who pronounces with certainty one concrete reason for

storytelling faces obloquy", he does eventually settle (if not with certainty) on one overarching reason that incorporates the others. It is based on the psychological reason and can be stated as: we tell stories to impose order on the world.

In this way, all storytelling (filmic or otherwise) is an exercise of existential control. The horror of meaningless existence is to too difficult to bear, so we use stories to find patterns, order and meaning in our existence. Yorke talks about the "need to confer shape" from book to bathroom towel arranging (p. 213).

This again invokes the concepts of fabula (story) and syuzhet (narrative): "Ordering *is* an act of perception, and it is this action that gives us narrative, rhetoric, drama… Storytelling, then is the *dramatization* of the process of knowledge assimilation". In fact, Yorke goes much further to claim that "Drama, therefore, mimics the way the brain assimilates knowledge, which is why it's identical to both legal argument and the basic essay structure we're taught at school… It is why theme is essential and why it arises unbidden from any work. Consciously or unconsciously, all drama is an argument with reality in which a conclusion is drawn and reality tamed," (Yorke, 2015, pp. 214-215).

Yorke is using a slightly different conception of 'argument' to this particular study. Argument *with* reality implies very specifically that the truths, subjective or otherwise, within the story are at odds with reality as experienced and is not the same as 'an assertion and reasons to believe such assertion.' However, elsewhere he does reference a closer conception of argument in that "All dramas are arguments about the nature of the world," (Yorke, 2015, p. 194).

Yorke throws yet another both common and specialist lexis into the mix – 'drama' – and defines it in terms of storytelling (narrative/syuzhet) and knowledge (story/fabula). Yorke is making an ontological claim here, so it is necessary to convert it into a thesis of a norm that categorizes the practice. To align the terminology within the 'storytellers just tell stories' structure, Yorke is stating that 'we're knowledge dramatizers: we just dramatize knowledge assimilation."

This makes Yorke's point-of-view is closely aligned with the film-as-worthwhile-argument central thesis of this study, although it must be stated that he is not claiming that the internal good of the practice is worthwhile argument. In fact, it is a side observation used to justify his championing of a five-act structure in drama. It does not have to be as all-encompassing as all drama in all forms, but could 'knowledge-assimilation dramatization' be a viable alternative conception of the internal good of the practice of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking? It is certainly feasible, but as was explored in Chapter 2, there is an issue

with knowledge as the fundamental target of filmmaking practice. The aspiration is simply not a realistic target within the confines of mainstream narrative feature film. A mainstream narrative feature film argument is concerned with reasoned opinion of ideas plausible and significant, something the definition of knowledge does not accommodate. It is not outside the realms of probability that some of the plausible and significant assertions may at some point qualify as knowledge, but that is not under the epistemic control of the practitioner(s). To be fair, Yorke does not clarify precisely what he means by 'knowledge'. But an argument to convince others of an opinion (which may not be held as certainly true, even by the author) need not be aimed at knowledge, given any reasonable conception of knowledge. In this way, Yorke's thesis departs dramatically from the central thesis here. Arguments are in the business of reasonable persuasion; they neither need to constitute, nor aspire to knowledge production. The conception of 'worthwhile' argument in this thesis does not hold itself to the high standard of producing knowledge as such.

Another objection is to Yorke's ontological claim that *all* drama can be reduced to simple general principles. This reductivism negates the idea that different forms have critical nuances with different traditions and internal good(s) that may not be compatible with any central unifying claim. The thesis is not making claims about all drama, but a very specific form of narrative. This specificity is crucial as there are many ways of telling stories that are not suited to mainstream narrative feature film. One example is The Odyssey (Homer, 1997). Noted as a classic of literature, it should be highly surprising that there have been no significant film adaptations of the complete work in the history of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking. The most significant attempt was a 1930's set reinterpretation by the Coen Brothers entitled *O Brother, Where Art Thou* (Coen, 2000), but it was the structure that was subsumed, with other elements only very loosely inspired by the original text. The central thesis of this study does not make the claim that the internal good of the television soap opera is 'worthwhile argument in a worthwhile way'. This form, due to its endless nature and the inevitable constant turnover of practitioners during the life of the production means that the idea of these shows being formed as any kind of argument is nonsensical, in precisely the same way that an endless argument that never reaches a conclusion is nonsensical: it is not rational to form a tradition around a self-defeating principle.

The 'we're storytellers: we just tell stories' alternative conception, even if the study takes the most challenging interpretation possible, does not constitute a successful objection to the central thesis. Filmmakers tell stories, but not any stories. What distinguishes the stories central to mainstream narrative filmmaking, from other stories? Since entertainment doesn't

distinguish the class, and knowledge production aims too high for the class, the most plausible alternative seems to be argument. Stories must have a point, not just a structure. A point to a story, is a conclusion. And a worthwhile way to establish a conclusion is to argue for it. However, there is one remaining alternative way of distinguishing the stories of mainstream narrative filmmaking. It is emotional manipulation: *filmmaking aims to tell stories that move people*.

4.4 Emotional Manipulation

"It's a punch. It's a total punch". This quote is from an interview from screenwriter/director Darren Aronofsky in defence of his film *mother!* (2017), which had become only one of 11 films in the history of western cinema to receive an 'F' rating by Cinemascore, a review aggregator in existence since 1978 which polls cinemagoers on the first night of release (Shanley, 2017).

> We wanted to make a punk movie and come at you. And the reason I wanted to come is because I was very sad and I had a lot of anguish and I wanted to express it… So I wanted to howl. And this was my howl. And some people are not going to want to listen to it. That's cool.
>
> (Aronofsky, cited in Hooton, 2017)

This point of view was front-and-centre in the reviews of the film. Owen Gleiberman, Chief Film Critics of *Variety* commented:

> If the only thing we wanted, or expected, a horror film to do was to get a rise out of you – to make your eyes widen and your jaw drop, to leave you in breathless chortling spasms of WTF disbelief – then Darren Aronofsky's "mother!" would have to be reckoned with as some sort of masterpiece. As it is, the movie… is far from a masterpiece. It's more like a dazzlingly skilful machine of virtual reality designed to get nothing but a rise out of you. It's a baroque nightmare that's about nothing but itself. Yet for an increasingly large swath of the moviegoing audience, that may be enough.
>
> (Gleiberman, 2017)

Embedded within this quote are the implicit cultural opinions that (a) horror films *are* about more than getting a rise out of you, (b) virtual reality *is* just about getting a rise out of you and (c) films need to be about more than just themselves, even if a section of the audience may not believe they require it.

But is Gleiberman correct? If he concedes that a significant section of the audience are happy to be (to use Aronofsky's parlance) merely 'punched', could that not be conceived to be a potential internal good of the practice? To develop the idea further, is it a viable conception that rather than attempting worthwhile argument, what practitioners are actually trying to do is *to simply tell emotionally charged and moving stories*?

Emotional Charge

An academic who works in this area is French film theorist, Martine Beugnet. In her book *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (2007) Beugnet coined the term 'cinema of sensation' when looking the release of a successive series of French mainstream narrative feature films that clearly prioritize the form's capability to impact the emotions and the senses, namely (English title in parentheses) *Baise Moi (Rape Me)* (Despentes & Trinh Thi, 2000), *Demonlover* (Assayas, 2002), *Lady Chatterley* (Ferran, 2006), *Romance* (Breillat, 1999) and *Venredi Soir (Friday Night)* (Denis, 2002), amongst others. Beugnet prioritized the visceral element of the films but the investigation still examined the works as intersections between the intellectual and the somatic. (In fact, Beugnet considers film as 'embodied thought' (2008), a concept compatible with the film-as-argument central thesis). Obviously Beugnet is making ontological rather than methodological claims, but her work still opens the way to an academic defence of an emotionally charged sensation-led cinema.

Some objections to this conception of internal goods are identical to those rebutting the idea of cinema as purely entertainment. If simple emotional manipulation is the internal good of the practice there are many easier ways to perform the same function, all of which are less time consuming, expensive or difficult to control as the creation of mainstream narrative feature film. This returns us to in no particular order, exploitation film, pornography and cat videos.

In addition, to use the surrounding discourses as indications of internal goods, the fact that Aronofsky is having to strenuously defend and justify his conception of his film to critics and audiences alike can be taken as a strong signifier that untethered emotional impact is not the tradition of the practice.

We will return to further objections at the close of the chapter, yet this is not to say that there is no merit to the underlying concept. Emotional engagement is a key strength of cinematic storytelling, so is there any other conceivable scenario where this functions as the internal good?

Desire Satisfaction

Taking a cue from John Yorke, who takes a fractal approach to storytelling analysis by arguing that scene structure mirrors overall film structure (2015, chapter 6), can the internal good of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking be viewed as nothing more than *desire-satisfaction*? There is a critical difference between being moved and having a desire satisfied, but is this distinction decisive?

As further chapters will explore, it is received wisdom that most individual scenes within a film set up a desire or desires-to-be-satisfied, be they significant or trivial (Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, 2018, p. 59). This relates back to common concepts of all film scenes requiring if not conflict, then constant tension (Mackendrick, 2004, p. 11). Films are often referred to as fantasy, in fact the oft-used term 'Hollywoodization' refers explicitly to the glamorization of any subject matter, so can the wish-fulfilment element not be the point of mainstream cinematic storytelling? Can the internal good of mainstream narrative feature films be the practice of setting up and then satisfying desire?

This conception carries weight and brings with it all the work of the psychoanalytic film theory. As this study is not explicitly concerned with the construction of the viewer within the practice (and, by definition, the viewer is not a practitioner), it is beyond the scope of this study to give a full assessment as to the validity of such a significant area of film study, but the most influential ideas will be noted to give weight to the theory of internal goods.

Many of Freud's concepts were used in the construction of psychoanalytic film theory, namely the id, ego, superego, Oedipal complex, narcissism, the unconscious, hysteria and castration (Falzon, 2002, p. 56). For purposes of this study, it is not relevant whether the audience desire is perceived as conscious or unconscious, merely that the internal good of the practice is to satisfy it. There are many variations in such a wide field of study, but most film psychoanalytic theories are based around the idea of the 'incomplete' audience becoming symbolically complete through the experience of watching the film, be it through a process of identification (Metz, 1982, pp. 42-56)**,** or by positioning all viewers as male and creating the female as the object of desire (Mulvey, 1975). Mulvey brought the Freudian term 'scopophilia' (pleasure from looking) into the academic mainstream and with it the very

specific sexual connotations of erotic pleasure from looking at the cinematic image. In this way, the film does not even have to set up the desire in order to satisfy it – if there is the desire to look, it is a pre-existing desire that the looking-at-film satisfies simply by the act of display.

These conscious/unconscious desires can be frivolous or significant and can function as simple wish-fulfilment or psychological need. An audience member will pick a given film for its palette of desires: to live life as a pilot; to get the girl/boy; or to have power over anyone – the list is quite literally endless. Genre can be viewed in this way, the social/financial contract that certain desires will be fulfilled by the close of the narrative. In a romantic comedy, the couple will be formed, in a conventional action thriller good will overcome evil.

This latter idea of a thematic goal to be satisfied lies at the heart of why the idea of desire-satisfaction cannot be the internal good of the practice. Desire-satisfaction may be a key storytelling method, but unlike Yorke and act structure, it cannot be extended to include the practice as a whole. If the internal good was simply about desire-satisfaction, then the practice would have evolved into essentially an anti-art practice – the training not so much about a practitioner 'finding their voice' as about finding ways to pander to the audience. Those lionized in the practice would not be directors such as Terrence Malick, but directors such as Michael Bay, director of high-budget action films such as *Transformers* (2007) and *Pearl Harbor* (2001). Discourses surrounding screenwriter and director Jordan Peele and his horror film *Get Out* (2017) demonstrate quite clearly that he has not become one of the hottest properties in Hollywood because his film simply delivered genre expectations, but also successfully and elegantly delivered a difficult truth regarding race relations in America (Keegan, 2017).

Using a more extended case study, perhaps the most 'pure' genre as relates to desire-satisfaction is the 'whodunnit': the crime (usually a murder) is set up at the start, creating with it a desire to know who committed it. This desire must sustain the complete running time of the film, when at the end the identity of the criminal or criminals are revealed and their motivations laid bare. Few, if any, whodunnits in cinematic history fail to reveal the perpetrators at the close. That is not the say that all loose ends are tied up, *The Big Sleep* (Hawks, 1946) is a famous example of this (Wigley, 2016) but the solving of the puzzle in the key joy of the experience – be it in literary or cinematic form.

The whodunnit is the most successful literary genre of all time. Agatha Christie (1890-1976) worked almost exclusively in this genre and is the best-selling author who ever lived

with an estimated minimum of *2 billion* books sold (de Bruxelles, 2005), a figure only potentially matched or surpassed by Shakespeare and the Bible.

So, if (a) the internal good of the practice is desire-satisfaction, (b) the whodunnit by the nature of the genre has to create a particularly strong single desire to sustain a feature-length running time, (c) the literary whodunnits are the best-selling genre of all time and (d) Agatha Christie is the best-selling whodunnit author of all time, then this introduces the question as to why most practitioners are not attempting to make whodunnits, why are whodunnit practitioners not canonized by the discourses surrounding mainstream narrative feature film, and by extension, why are not most financially successful films whodunnits?

The answer is that desire-satisfaction is not enough. As of writing, the most successful whodunnit of all time *Murder on the Orient Express* (Branagh, 2017) has made just under US$352 million at the international box office, from a $55 million budget. The highest grossing film of all time is *Avengers: Endgame* (Russo & Russo, 2019) with nearly US$2.8 billion (Boxofficemojo.com, 2019). There is not a whodunnit in the top 50 grossing films as of 2019. A reasonable objection to this would be that whodunnits simply satisfy the *wrong* desire, that mainstream narrative feature films set up various specific desires and finding out 'who did it' is not one with widespread appeal. This might explain the lack of grosses, but does not fully account for the discourses surrounding the genre. Whodunnits are not seen as 'prestige pictures'; they do not win significant awards for direction or screenwriting, have never won a best picture American Academy Award (Murray, 2017) and are viewed at the low end in the hierarchy of genre.

There seems to be a public admission as to the problem of adapting Agatha Christie to the screen in how the films are cast. *Murder on the Orient Express* is arguably the most famous work by the bestselling author of all time. With underlying intellectual property of this strength, this should make any resulting film non-cast dependent, in that the film should 'work' with any cast as the heavy marketing weight is being done by the author and the genre. Spielberg films are good examples of this. For most of his career his name alone did the heavy lifting, and he didn't work with 'A' list stars until *Catch Me if You Can* (2002). *Ready Player One* (2018) is cast with relative unknowns. Yet in both feature film versions of the book (Lumet, 1974 and Branagh, 2017) the cast has been quite literally packed full of stars: Albert Finney, Richard Widmark, Sean Connery, Lauren Bacall, Anthony Perkins, John Gielgud, Michael York, Vanessa Redgrave and Ingrid Bergman in the former and Johnny Depp, Penelope Cruz, Daisy Ridley, Dame Judi Dench, Sir Derek Jacobi and Willem Defoe in the latter. This inevitably betrays a lack of confidence in the source material. Stars are

expensive and are only used when absolutely required – and it is also worthy of note that *Knives Out* (2019), an Agatha Christie pastiche is cast similarly, this time with Daniel Craig, Chris Evans, Jamie Lee Curtis, Toni Collette, Christopher Plummer, Lakeith Stanfield and Don Johnson filling out the ensemble. This use of stars as a form of 'insurance' is something that will be examined in more detail in Chapter 6.

Finally, to illustrate further why desire-satisfaction is not the internal good of the form, imagine that, as a viewer, once you have seen the set-up of the crime and the suspects have been laid out in front of you, you skipped directly to the 'reveal' part at the end of the film. Your desire would be sated without having to watch most of the middle of the film. (It must be noted that most Sherlock Holmes short stories are structured like this (Conan Doyle, 1930). In the first half of the narrative, the mystery is laid out in front of Holmes and the second half comprises Holmes telling Watson how he solved it). In this way, it is highly unlikely that the internal good of mainstream narrative feature film would be based around a concept that allows for removal of most of the narrative yet still remain a satisfying experience.

To conclude, desire-satisfaction is certainly a key technique when constructing a mainstream narrative feature film, but it should not be mistaken for the internal good. However, emotional manipulation provides one final challenge to the thesis, as it is possible to combine both emotional punch and desire-satisfaction. Does this fusion provide a more valid alternate conception?

Films that typify 'emotionally-charged desire' are those that are able to provoke an audience to really care about something (usually the fate of a character), then continually build the desire through obstacles before finding an emotionally fitting way of satisfying that desire. Successful examples of this are pure revenge films such as both volumes of *Kill Bill* (Tarantino, 2003 & 2004). However, there is a reason revenge films are also a staple sub-genre of exploitation films (of which Meir Zarchi's 1978 *I Spit on Your Grave* is a prime example) as although they might satisfy an emotionally-charged desire they are thematically shallow, instead prioritizing the mechanics of the reprisal.

A film such as the aforementioned *Schindler's List* also conforms to the emotionally-charged desire-satisfaction model, and is far removed any hint of exploitation. Yet although the film creates a powerful emotional desire – for Schindler's workers to be protected and rescued – that is duly satisfied, the value of the film is not purely in the rescue. A scenario where the workers were buried in a mudslide and Schindler successfully supervised their extraction, would likely result in a lesser film.

The final category of films that undermine emotionally-charged desire-satisfaction as a viable internal good are those lauded cases of mainstream narrative feature films that provide neither significant emotional charge, nor desire-satisfaction. These examples are less common, but films such as Martin Scorsese's, *Raging Bull* (1980), *Taxi Driver* (1976) and *The Irishman* (2019), operate as Sinnerbrink (2018) outlined, by invoking ambivalence and moral cognitive dissonance. The films do not provide any characters the audience are invited to root for, instead choosing to focus on compelling situations, minimizing any desires as to individual fates. Yet these films are certainly mainstream, embraced by audiences and critics alike, and are capable of making coherent arguments. *Badlands* (Malick, 1973), analysed in depth in Chapter 3, is another such example.

As with all the alternative conceptions that have been examined here, desire-satisfaction, whether or not tethered to emotional charge, is susceptible to the 'why' question. Why tell emotionally charged and moving stories? Why set up desires to be satisfied? For what purpose? Whether it is to entertain or help dramatize knowledge-assimilation, it does not categorise the practice as a whole – a film that attempt only to do this would be by definition an empty experience. To return to Darren Aronofsky, his film "howl" may have satisfied his own desire, but the story did not impact in any significant or meaningful sense. The audience may have been provoked emotionally, but not in the service of anything larger than the sensation itself. It demonstrates that it is not enough to simply move the audience, it is necessary to move them somewhere worthwhile. Emotional manipulation in both its forms is also susceptible to the usual objections outlined in this chapter, in that it is an internal good far simpler achieved using a myriad of other forms storytelling or otherwise; essentially there are far more efficient ways to "punch".

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an account of the most prevalent conceptions of the internal goods of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking, as articulated by industry practitioners and commentators. These conceptions all challenged the central thesis, and have been demonstrated to be, although in some cases highly desirable, inadequate or unnecessary and therefore not definitive of the practice overall.

This leaves a final pertinent question: Why just one internal good? In the same way that different genres clearly pursue different goods (comedies to make us laugh, horrors to scare), could there not be a series of goods, all equally valid that combine to define the

traditions of the practice? The answer involves recourse to dominant industry thought, which is explored in Chapter 5.

Chapter Five

Dominant Theories of Professional Screenwriting and Directing

Chapter 2 was comprised largely of a non-traditional literature review examining the major academic debates concerning film as philosophical argument in order to build a case for mainstream narrative feature film's ability to argue by a less stringent definition of the concept. This chapter is a more traditional literature review in that it will give a sense of the field of incumbent professional thinking as a whole before focusing key dominant texts, synthesising the key ideas relevant to this study and noting the significant gap in knowledge that further builds the case for the film-as-argument thesis.

5.1 The Writing Gurus: Incumbent Thinking for Industry Screenwriters

There are two distinct parts to constructing a feature film: the construction of the screenplay and the construction of the film itself. Whilst there is much overlap, the skills base required to complete these tasks are quite different and require very different methodologies. Like any construction, a blueprint is required, and the screenplay can be most pragmatically thought of as simply "a map to a story" (Fisher, 2005).

Due to the high odds against any given screenplay reaching production in the mainstream sector, the screenwriting profession is predominantly a freelance one and, "a support industry of manual-writing – the 'how to become a successful screenwriter' book – has grown up," (Macdonald, 2013, p. 18). These books can be highly influential in articulating the orthodoxies of the screenwriting process, indicating the overall doxa – the received wisdom of screenwriting – that informs individual micro-judgements on technique. However, between 2007-2012 there were more than 100 new books on screenwriting alone accessioned into the US Library of Congress (Brenes, 2014), so it is critical a way is found to isolate the most influential texts.

In her 2014 paper, *Gurus and Oscar Winners: How-To Screenwriting Manuals in the New Cultural Economy*, Bridget Conor lists "a representative sample of popular and classic manuals", namely screenwriting manuals. The list is compiled as part of a "broader

qualitative research project involving labor market analysis, interviews and observations of screenwriting as labor, practice, and pedagogy," (Conor, 2014, p. 125). Conor splits her list into two-tiers of guru, first-tier for canonical individuals/texts, second-tier for significant but less widespread influencers.

The top five, as defined by the sales figures of their most famous works, are:

1. *Story* (1998) by Robert McKee
2. *The Writer's Journey* (1998) by Christopher Vogler
3. *How to Make a Good Script Great* (1994) by Linda Seger
4. *Screenwriting Updated* (2000) by Linda Aronson
5. *Screenplay* (2005) by Syd Field

These five books form the foundation of the critical examination of the literature produced by the industry to inform, educate and induct members into the profession. Some of these texts have been in circulation for over twenty years, others represent the cutting edge of current professional thinking. All represent the dominant accounts of practice in their respective fields, as demonstrated by their book sales and their employment in film schools (Conor, 2014, p. 125).

Analysis of these texts should establish what are considered the current traditions of the screenwriting element of the practice as well as giving strong indications of what are likely to be the current internal goods of the practice overall. As Macdonald notes based on his analysis of popular screenwriting manuals in 2002 and 2012, "Most manuals present the industrial orthodoxy; the dominant conventions of the doxa," and further that, "the extent of the consensus of the manuals on offer reveals the coherence of their orthodoxy," (2013, p. 39 and p. 46).

This is not to say that there is no validity to more conventional research in this area. Screenwriting as creative practice is an emerging academic field worthy of note, despite it having struggled to justify its existence within the academy due to 'dirty' connotations "to an industry some see far removed from the academy," (Batty, 2015). Journals such as *Media Practice and Education* (formerly *Journal of Media Practice*), *New Writing* and *The Journal of Screenwriting* significantly develop the discipline of screenwriting as creative practice, with Macdonald (2003, 2004, 2013) and Batty (2015) particularly doing excellent work with a focus on professional application. Macdonald's notion of 'the screen idea', "a term for what people think they are trying to create," is a conception that due to its fluidity enables

screenwriting to be studied from a variety of perspectives and "allows us to talk of what lies behind what is on screen – beliefs as well as practice," (2013, p. 6) and Batty's work on championing theme as a core development approach is very complementary to this thesis, even if it relates theme to emotion rather than argument (2015, p. 116). However, the reason these works are not examined in detail in this study is that there is currently no evidence of the impact of this work on industry (namely professional working or emerging screenwriters) and as such a significant case cannot be made for it to represent dominant thinking.

Before the analysis begins, it is imperative to note that part of this thesis is defending the notion that the practice of mainstream narrative feature films is at least to some extent *incognizant*, that the practitioners and the 'canonical' educators of the practitioners tend to either conceptualize the practice in a somewhat opaque way, or don't conceptualize the practice in depth at all. Therefore, the critical hermeneutical analysis of these texts is both an investigation into what the books and gurus say and, decisively and problematically, do *not* say.

Screenplay, Syd Field

It is worth approaching the analysis in rough chronological order, in order to get a sense of how reflection on screenwriting practice has evolved and how it has been finessed by a succession of modern story analysts.

With its first edition published in 1979, *Screenplay* was one of the first books to formalize practical screenwriting theory for a wide audience. To put this into context, although the Moscow Film School was founded in 1919, it was very much a technical school based on cinematography (between 1934-1991 it was actually named the All-Union Institute of Cinematography), and the idea of film education to degree level only took root in the west in the 1960s. Columbia University School of the Arts and the New York University Tisch School of the Arts were both founded in 1965. This means there had only been 10 graduating film school classes by the time Field's book was first published.

Like most books dedicated to professional practice, it is primarily concerned with improving *how* practitioners practice, not *why* they practice. To use the analogy of a car, they are want to help the reader drive better, no delve into why they drive. It is perhaps likely that this is viewed as a superfluous question, that the presumption is that it is clearly self-evident why feature film narrative storytellers tell feature film narrative stories or drivers drive cars, and not something that has to be dealt with on a book about technique. But obviously this is a significant ellipsis, especially as the *why* has considerable impact on the *how*.

Field goes into detail on all key areas of screenplay storytelling technique, with chapters on creation of subject, character, structure, plotting, scenes, sequences, form, adaptation and collaboration. However, the three most relevant concepts he outlines are the *idea*, *subject* and *dramatic premise*.

Field comments that a "…screenplay is *a story told with pictures, in dialogue and description, and placed within the context of dramatic structure.* That's what it is; that is its nature. It is the art of visual storytelling," (Field, 2005, p. 2). His basic conception of story is that**:**

> …[Y]ou have to set up your characters, introduce the dramatic premise (what the story is about) and the dramatic situation (the circumstances surrounding the action), create obstacles for your characters to confront and overcome, then resolve the story.
>
> (Field, 2005, p. 3)

This introduces the idea and context of dramatic premise, but it should also be noted that Field's basic conception of storytelling so far includes no mention any deeper underlying element to the story, such as theme. This is indicative of Field's priority in setting out the elements of storytelling. This priority is echoed further in his use of chess as a metaphor for the relationships between the various storytelling elements.

> If you take the game of chess, for example, the game itself is a whole composed of four parts… Those four parts – the pieces, the player(s), the board, and the rules – are integrated into the whole, and the result is a game of chess. It is the relationship between these parts and the whole that determines the game. The same relationship holds true in a story. A story is the whole, and the elements that make up that story – the action, characters, conflicts, scenes, sequences, dialogue, action, Act I, II and III, incidents, episodes, events, music, locations, etc. – are the parts, and this relationship between the parts and the whole make up the story.
>
> (Field, 2005, p. 20)

It is clear that Field is attempting to be exhaustive here, even going so far as to list 'incidents' as distinct to 'events', but he makes no mention of theme or any other unifying concept to these elements.

On closer examination, although Field almost never mentions the word 'theme', he approaches what could be considered thematic concepts with his thoughts on the 'idea' for a screenplay. He writes: "What do you need to write a screenplay? An idea… An idea, while essential, is nothing more than a vague notion. It also has no detail, no depth, no dimension," (Field, 2005, p. 32).

Field develops this further with his definition of the 'subject' of a screenplay. Initially, Field's conception is remarkably superficial. He writes: "You need a subject to embody and dramatize the idea. A subject is defined as an action and a character. An action is what the story is about, and a character is who the story is about." He continues his exposition of the idea without adding approaching anything that could be considered thematic:

> If we remember that a screenplay is like a noun, about a person in a place, doing his/her "thing," we can see that the person is the main character and doing his/her "thing" is the action. So, when we talk about the subject of a screenplay, we're talking about an action and a character or characters.
>
> (Field, 2005, p. 32).

Nonetheless, in Field's discussion of *The Last Samurai* (Zwick, 2003) he does begin to indicate more sub-textual elements.

> And make no mistake, every screenplay has a subject. The Last Samurai (John Logan) is about an embittered Civil War mercenary (Tom Cruise) who travels to Japan and is ultimately transformed by the people who were originally his enemy, a band of samurai warriors. The character is the Civil War mercenary, and the action is how he is transformed in thought, word, and action, allowing him to regain a sense of self he had lost after the war ended. But that's only what the film is about on the surface. On a deeper level, what it's really about is how the American military adviser learns to embody the virtues of honor and loyalty.
>
> (Field, 2005, p. 33-34).

Notwithstanding this allusion to a deeper level of analysis, Field offers no development of the idea, and the example remains confined to the character's learning of the virtues, not the virtues (or the learning) as a wider thematic point of view.

Field's idea of a dramatic premise does seem at first glance to be a discussion of theme, yet his conception is both problematic, inconsistent and ultimately remains confined to the level of the individual character going on a journey. "The dramatic premise is what the screenplay is about; it provides the dramatic thrust that drives the story to its conclusion," (Field, 2005, p. 24).

Field here is not talking about theme, but what is often referred to the 'hook' of the film, the surface plot set-up, for example, 'boy from 1985 stuck in 1955' (*Back to the Future*, Zemekis, 1985) or 'woman falls in love with trapped water creature' (*The Shape of Water*, del Toro, 2017). As Field later states, using his own case study of an improvised thriller plot, "Perhaps she discovers through an investigation that a particular nuclear plant is unsafe. Politics being what they are, maybe a politician supports the plant despite the fact that it is unsafe. This becomes our story's hook, or dramatic premise," (Field, 2005, p. 83).

It is when Field attempts to use the case study to expand the idea of dramatic premise that it becomes inconsistent as he equates it directly with one of his few mentions of theme:

> From now on, through a process of trial and error, we're going to be searching for a theme, or dramatic premise: something that will move Sarah in a particular direction to generate a dramatic action. The subject of screenplay, remember, is an *action* and a *character*.
>
> (Field, 2005, p. 81).

Field's concepts become tangled together and the result is opaque. Dramatic premise, as Field defines it, is 'hook' not 'theme', and these are mutually exclusive concepts. Nor is theme 'subject', even though in his definition of subject he uses the question usually reserved to discuss theme, namely 'what is the film about?' His two main examples, *American Beauty* (Mendes, 1999) and *Thelma and Louise* (Scott, 1991), both again remain steadfastly on the surface level of character experience:

> And that lets us know what the story is all about: Lester regaining the life he has lost or given up, and becoming whole and complete again as a person… If you want to write a screenplay, what is it about?... Do you for example, want to tell the story of two women going on a crime spree?
>
> (Field, 2005, pp. 22-23)

In summary, the book excels when the focus is on the minutiae of screenwriting, delineating the separate elements (character, dialogue, events etc.) and advising how best the screenwriter can approach them. However, Field appears to take for granted the internal good of the practice – leaving it unstated – and it is this, combined with the inconsistent and sometimes wholly contradictory use of terminology concerning such foundational elements as theme, premise and subtext, that mean the book fails to provide a satisfactory account of the screenwriting process as a whole.

***Making a Good Script Great*, Linda Seger**

In *Making a Good Script Great* (1994), Linda Seger advances a definition of 'idea' that differs markedly from Field's. Nonetheless, she also uses the term inconsistently, sometimes using it as a synonym of her conception of theme, sometimes encompassing much more than theme. It worth noting here that this is an ongoing issue across the literature; an analysis of 12 prominent manuals available in 2004 identified 17 common terms in over half the texts examined but disparity between 397 other terms (Macdonald, 2004).

Initially Seger states that "This idea causes audiences to identify with the characters and situations, usually because the theme tells us something about our human condition. Ideas convey the meaning of events – what the writer believes about why things happen, what we can learn from them, about cause and effect, and the meaning of life," (Seger, 1994, p. 120). This conception of a film's 'idea' clearly includes not just theme, but the entire viewpoint of the film. Seger's examples provide further define 'idea' in this way:

> The idea might be about the meaning of something we've experienced (if you're reckless in sex, you can jeopardize your family [*Fatal Attraction*], or violence has far-reaching effects on the lives of those who practice it [*Unforgiven*], or about an underlying message that the writer wants to communicate through a story rather than through an essay (perhaps that common decency combined with opportunity can lead to an "Absolute Good" as in *Schindler's List*).
>
> (Seger, 1994, p. 120)

It is very relevant for this thesis that Seger here compares a narrative feature film with an essay, but the concept is not further developed. It is presented as a distinct type of filmic message, separate from the first two examples – *Unforgiven* (Eastwood, 1992) and *Fatal Attraction* (Lyne, 1987) – without furnishing a reason for the distinction. When Seger

discusses theme, the term is used inconsistently. Initially she uses it to refer to the singular central abstract concept on which the film will hold a point-of-view, “”Revenge” is another theme that has universal significance”, but then almost immediately she uses the term to refer to both the singular abstract concept *and* the point-of-view. She writes: “Another common theme that helps us identify with the story is “triumph of the human spirit,” (Seger, 1994, p. 120).

Thus, when Seger talks about communicating the ‘theme’, it is unclear precisely what is meant, although it is likely that she is referring to the latter *concept plus point-of-view* definition. Seger comments about how best to communicate theme without any further conceptualization about the idea of an ‘essay’ film. As with other gurus examined in this chapter, Seger is simply (and perhaps understandably for her target audience) guiding the reader on how to maximize drama, rather than understand the practice itself. As Seger points out:

> Once you know what to say, you also need to know how to say it. Theme is the least interesting when it’s communicated through talky dialogue, when it’s said rather than expressed through more dramatic means. Although lines of dialogue here and there can express the theme (re-watch *Room With A View* to see how dialogue can express the theme of identity without getting talky), the theme will be far better expressed by concentrating on other more cinematic choices.
>
> (Seger, 1994, p. 129)

These cinematic choices are primarily events and character decisions. “Theme can be communicated through decisions that your characters make within the story… Themes of corruption, greed, cowardice and disillusionment can easily be expressed dramatically through character actions,” (Seger, 1994, p. 130).

Here the idea of film-as-argument (or at least ‘essay’ in Seger’s terms) would be useful, but is not explored. If aspiring writers understand that it is argumentation that is being presented, not just an inconsistent definition of ‘theme’, their understanding of how to communicate through story choices may well increase too.

As the study examines other gurus, it will become a common theme that there is a resistance, conscious or otherwise, to conceptualizing film-as-argument and the terminology that accompanies it despite the building blocks of the view being present in their ideas. A theme plus a point-of-view is an assertion that the film hopes to establish. Using the

terminology of this thesis, such a thing is an *argument*. The questions Seger suggests aspiring writers ask themselves when constructing 'the message' of a screenplay is consistent with forming a consistent argument. She writes:

> Is my theme expressed through character and through action, rather than just through dialogue? Do my images help expand my theme? Have I stayed away from having a character "give a message" to the audience? Have I been willing to give up a smaller theme if it conflicts with the main theme of the story?
>
> (Seger, 1994, pp. 133-134)

It is also worth noting that the concern not to 'give a message' is not to avoid the film giving a message, but to avoid having that message explicitly spelled out by a character. As Seger is primarily concerned with execution than conceptualization, this is a reasonable priority.

***Story*, Robert McKee**

Robert McKee is undoubtedly the most well-known of the gurus. His 1997 book *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting*, is considered the 'mother-text' of all screenwriting books. Currently in its nineteenth edition, it has been translated into 20 languages (Conor, 2014, p. 127). Director Spike Jonze represented McKee (played by Brian Cox) in his film about a screenwriter struggling to adapt a novel for the screen, in *Adaptation* (2002).

In Chapter 4, the study looked at common inconsistencies in the conceptualization of the term 'story.' Adding to the general confusion, in this key text entitled *Story*, McKee writes: "A story is not only what you say but how you say it," (McKee, 1998, p. 8). The book is split into four unequal parts: *The Writer and the Art of Story*, *The Elements of Story, The Principles of Story Design* and *The Writer at Work*.

McKee describes the drive to tell stories in terms of a search for answers a philosophical question. He writes:

> Day after day we seek an answer to the ageless question Aristotle posed in *Ethics*: How should a human being lead his life?... Traditionally humankind has sought the answer to Aristotle's question from the four wisdoms – philosophy, science, religion, art – taking insight from each…
>
> (McKee, 1998, p. 11)

McKee pushes the importance of stories even further. “As our faith in traditional ideologies diminishes, we turn to the source we still believe in: the art of story,” (McKee, 1998, p. 12). As the study noted in Chapter 2, he weighs-in on the ‘entertainment’ debate:

> But what, after all, is entertainment? To be entertained is to be immersed in the ceremony of story to an intellectually and emotionally satisfying end. To the film audience, entertainment is the ritual of sitting in the dark, concentrating on a screen in order to experience the story’s meaning and, with that insight, the arousal of strong, at times even painful emotions, and as the meaning deepens, to be carried to the ultimate satisfaction of those emotions.
>
> (McKee, 1998, p. 12)

Here he stresses the importance of meaning and insight to the story experience, and later in the book he adds to the idea of entertainment that “…lasting entertainment is found only in the charged human truths beneath the image,” (McKee, 1998, p. 25) and that, “All coherent tales express an idea veiled inside an emotional spell,” (McKee, 1998, p. 129).

As the study explored in Chapter 2 (and will interrogate further in Chapters 7 and 8) this idea of the ‘emotional spell’ is very reminiscent of Aristotle’s ideas in *Rhetoric* on the art of persuasion; that is it comprised of three elements: Ethos (credible source of argument), Logos (the argument is internally logical) and Pathos, (that the argument invokes the emotions and senses). However, McKee does not rely on Aristotle’s theories in this way, instead he focuses on what he refers to as ‘aesthetic emotion.’ He states that, “…in life, idea and emotion come separately… But whereas life separates meaning from emotion, art unites them. Story is an instrument by which you create such epiphanies at will, the phenomenon known as *aesthetic emotion*,” (McKee, 1998, pp. 110-111).

McKee explains that aesthetic emotion is “the simultaneous encounter of thought and feeling… In short, a story well told gives you the very thing you cannot get from life: meaningful emotional experience,” (McKee, 1998, p. 111). This combination of thought and feeling becomes close to Aristotle’s thoughts on persuasion, and as McKee explains further, the reasons for his resistance to the idea of film-as-argument begin to emerge:

> In this sense, story is, at heart, nonintellectual. It does not express ideas in the dry, intellectual *arguments* [my emphasis] of an essay. But this is not to say that story is anti-intellectual. We pray that the writer has ideas of import and insight. Rather the

> exchange between artist and audience expresses idea directly through the senses and perceptions, intuition and emotion. It requires no mediator, no critic to rationalize the transaction, to replace the ineffable and the sentient with explanation and abstraction.
>
> (McKee, 1998, p. 111)

The idea that story is wholly "nonintellectual" and operates purely at the sensory, intuitive and emotional level seems to be hyperbole at best. It is also unclear precisely what McKee means by the terms "ineffable" and "sentient" in this context. Again, to be fair to McKee, he is not writing an academic study, *Story* is essentially a self-help book aimed at both amateurs and professionals and therefore to make a point clear it may have to rely uncomfortably on generalizations. However, McKee does indicate that the concept of an argument or an essay is "dry" and this association is not a positive one. McKee continues in this vein:

> A well-told story neither expresses the clockwork reasonings of a thesis nor vents raging inchoate emotions. It triumphs in the marriage of the rational with the irrational. For a work that's either essentially emotional or essentially intellectual cannot have the validity of one that calls upon our subtler faculties of sympathy, empathy, premonition, discernment… our innate sensitivity to the truth.
>
> (McKee, 1998, p. 111)

There is an attempt here to show that stories (McKee is very much concerned with mainstream narrative feature films) need a balance of reason and emotion, but McKee clearly dismisses the idea that one can be at the service of the other. As McKee develops the idea, stories combine both thought and feeling simultaneously. A combination of thought and feeling generates meaningful emotion because it gives feelings cognitive content. In a meaningful emotional experience, our feelings are about something; they indicate something contentful about the situations humans encounter or appraise. This means that emotions can, in the right circumstances, supply reasons for thought. Emotion isn't merely a mixture of two separate things; emotional experience has the power to reveal to us reasons to believe propositions. Thus, in stories and elsewhere, arguments are generated through emotional experiences. If this is right, then McKee's contrast between "clockwork reasonings of a thesis" and "raging inchoate emotions" is overdrawn. The very experiences McKee thinks are generated by stories well-told, are reasons to believe a *thesis*.

It is perhaps most illuminating that although McKee's stance is that story is "nonintellectual" he continues to conceptualize (film) story using very argument-like logic. For example, he writes about story structure as follows: "STRUCTURE [his capitalization] is a selection of events from the characters' life stories that is composed into a strategic sequence to arouse specific emotions and to express a specific view of life," (McKee, 1998, p. 33). Again, when discussing point-of-view, he writes, "If, to some people, a writer's final statement about life appears dogmatic and opinionated, so be it. Bland and pacifying writers are a bore. We want unfettered souls with the courage to take a point of view, artists whose insights startle and excite," (McKee, 1998, p. 113).

Here McKee is describing the assertion of the writer, and the "strategic sequence to arouse specific emotions and express a specific view of life". This is very similar to an argument, depending on the precise unpacking of what it means to "express a specific view of life". One may marshal the resources of a story in order to express a point of view; the question is whether in doing so, one furnishes reasons to accept the point of view. Mere expression of a view does not require the resources of storytelling. Making a view convincing or compelling or attractive does. McKee's underlying commitment to the idea that stories are forms of argument is demonstrated in the following passage:

> Make no mistake: While a story's inspiration may be a dream and its final effect aesthetic emotion, a work moves from an open premise to a fulfilling climax only when the writer is possessed by serious thought. For an artist must have not only ideas to express, but ideas *to prove*. Expressing an idea, in the sense of exposing it, is never enough. The audience must not just understand; it must believe. You want the world to leave your story convinced that yours is a truthful metaphor for life. And the means by which you bring the audience to your point of view resides in the very design you give your telling. As you create your story you create your proof; idea and structure intertwine in a rhetorical relationship.
>
> (McKee, 1998, p. 113)

What McKee has described here, the idea of not just of expressing, but of 'proving' the writer's assertion by means of a narrative, is an argument. Yet he resists the idea of film-as-argument. Instead he uses the term 'metaphor'. He repeats this conceptualization throughout the book, such as "Story is metaphor for life," (McKee, 1998, p. 25). Whilst films can function as metaphor, for example, the aliens as a metaphor for marginal and racially

maligned groups in *District 9* (Blomkamp, 2009), this account is too reductive as metaphor is only one of the means practitioners have to establish an effective argument. This has already been noted in Chapter 2, and these methods will be fully examined in the case studies in Chapters 7 and 8.

The term also suffers for being imprecise, especially if the "metaphor for life" is referring to the final statement of a film. Assertion, statement, point-of-view, conclusion are all more accurate, but do have much 'dryer' connotations. McKee states that, "A storyteller is a life poet, an artist who transforms day-to-day living, inner life and outer life, dream and actuality into a poem whose rhyme scheme is events rather than words – a two hour metaphor that says: Life is like *this*!" (McKee, 1998, p. 25). However, even this is inconsistent with his earlier comments. It is highly likely that McKee is simply being overly loose with his terminology here, but this does again somewhat undermine the points he is making about the nature of story and storytellers. The Aristotelian concern that McKee stated earlier was not the ontological concern of how life is, but how best to live it. The idea that all stories show that 'life is like this' is a wholly descriptive conception, failing to take into account all prescriptive conceptions of story; not those that tell us how life *is*, but how life *should be*.

Why is McKee resistant to the film-as-argument thesis? One possible explanation is the *fear of explanation*:

> Master storytellers never explain. They do the hard, painfully creative thing – they dramatize. Audiences are rarely interested, and certainly never convinced, when forced to listen to the discussion of ideas… A great story authenticates its ideas solely within the dynamics of events; failure to express a view of life through the pure, honest consequences of human choice and action is a creative defeat no amount of clever language can salvage.
>
> (McKee, 1998, p. 114)

This avoidance of explicit explanatory speech may be apt, but this is clearly a concern with execution, not conception. This is McKee's priority. *Story* is foremost a book about craft: "This craft [of story composition] is neither mechanics nor gimmicks. It is a concert of techniques by which we create a conspiracy of interest between ourselves and the audience," (McKee, 1998, pp. 21-22).

Fear of poor execution should not predicate a less useful conceptualization of the practice, but this seems to be the case. And it is further delineated when McKee comes to his greatest fear, that of obvious *didacticism*. He expounds on this in the following passage:

> A note of caution: In creating the dimensions of your story's "argument," take great care to build the power of both sides… in other words, do not slant your "argument"… the danger is this: when your Premise is an idea you feel you must prove to the world, and you design your story as an undeniable certification of that idea, you set yourself on the road to didacticism. In your zeal to persuade, you will stifle the voice of the other side. Misusing and abusing art to preach, your screenplay will become a thesis film, a thinly disguised sermon as you strive in a single stroke to convert the whole world. Didacticism results from the naïve enthusiasm that fiction can be used like a scalpel to cut out the cancers of society.
>
> (McKee, 1998, p. 121)

McKee is again concerned with execution, concerned with the "slanting" of the argument rather than the argument itself. How would the film function if the writer gave full voice to all sides of an issue? This does not seem a good recipe for avoiding didacticism. How is a 'thesis' film different from the film that hopes to prove its metaphor for life (to use McKee's terminology)? What is most illustrative is the use of speech marks for the two times he refers to "argument". It is the only time in the book he refers to stories as such, and it is done so in a cautionary way, suggesting it is the *wrong* way to conceptualize story, and even within that context the concept is separated from all other concepts by the speech marks. No other concept receives the same treatment and the usual use of these marks, as scare quotes, is to indicate that the author does not fully agree with the use of the term.

McKee makes clear that he fears a plethora of badly written didactic films: "When talented people write badly it's generally for one of two reasons: Either they're blinded by an idea they feel compelled to prove or they're driven by an emotion they must express," (McKee, 1998, p. 7) but this is perhaps not the only fear. There is arguably a bigger reason that relates back to the discussion in Chapter 4 about the power and influence of film, particularly the reach and impact of mainstream narrative feature film. McKee writes:

> Writers deal with ideas, but not in the open, rational manner of philosophers. Instead, they conceal their ideas inside the seductive emotions of art. Yet felt ideas, as Plato

> pointed out, are ideas nonetheless. Every effective society sends a charged idea out to us, in effect compelling the idea into us, so that we must believe. In fact, the persuasive power of a story is so great that we may believe its meaning even if we find it morally repellent.
>
> (McKee, 1998, p. 130)

The persuasive power of a story is beginning to be quantified through academic analysis. The work of Green and Brock (2000), investigates not only narrative feature film's power to convince the audience of things that they know to be factually untrue (even if only for a short period of time) but also to have an effect on the identity and self-perception of the viewer themselves.

The conception of film-as-argument could perhaps be viewed as the industry's 'big secret'. In the same way that it is politically expedient for the screen industry that films and television generally are viewed as harmless, as *just entertainment*, if the primary conception of a mainstream narrative feature film was as argument, as structured persuasion, then it could be viewed as a danger to the industry itself – not just from bad writing, but from other institutions. As McKee states:

> Authoritative personalities, like Plato, fear the threat that comes not from idea, but from emotion. Those in power never want us to feel. Thought can be controlled and manipulated, but emotion is willful and unpredictable. Artists threaten authority by exposing lies and inspiring passion for change. This is why when tyrants seize power, their firing squads aim at the heart of the writer.
>
> (McKee, 1998, p. 130)

In contrast to the clumsy didactic writer, McKee pushes his conception of the virtuous writer, using not a conception of argument, but of theme, metaphor, premise and what he terms 'controlling idea' (McKee, 1998, p. 115). McKee's writers' virtues are quite different from McIntyre's and those outlined in this thesis, but comprise both regulatory and motivational modes. McKee's writer should possess a love of: *Story, The Dramatic, Truth, Humanity, Sensation, Dreaming, Humour, Language, Duality, Perfection, Uniqueness, Beauty* and *Self* (McKee, 1998, p. 21).

For McKee, "Theme has become a rather vague term in the writer's vocabulary. "Poverty," "war," and "love" for example, are not themes; they relate to setting or genre. A

theme is not a word but a sentence – one clear, coherent sentence that expresses a story's irreducible meaning," (McKee, 1998, p. 115). It is likely deliberate, but it must be noted that McKee – in his rejection of theme as a singular idea – here actually deviates from most other gurus but then quickly defines a new wider term to describe much the same thing. "I prefer the phrase *Controlling Idea*, for like theme, it names a story's root or central idea, but it also implies function: The Controlling Idea shapes the writer's strategic choices," (McKee, 1998, p. 115).

McKee describes a film's premise as "the idea that inspires the writer's desire to create a story", and controlling idea as "the story's ultimate meaning expressed through the action and aesthetic emotion of the last act's climax," (McKee, 1998, p. 112). It is here that the 'controlling idea' starts to appear to be very much like argument:

> The Controlling Idea of a completed story must be expressible in a single sentence… the film must be molded around one idea. This is not to say that a story can be reduced to a rubric. Far more is captured within the web of a story that can ever be stated in words – subtleties, subtexts, conceits, double meanings, richness of all kinds. A story becomes a kind of living philosophy that the audience members grasp as a whole, in a flash, without conscious thought – a perception married to their life experiences.
>
> (McKee, 1998, p. 115)

The concept of 'living philosophy' seems more to be an example of verbal gymnastics in the avoidance of film-as-argument than a useful conceptualization of the form. McKee goes into considerable detail concerning how the controlling idea works, but as much as he criticized the term 'theme' as vague, his replacement suffers from a lack of transparency:

> The Controlling Idea has two components: Value plus Cause. It identifies the positive or negative charge of the story's critical value at the last act's climax, and it identifies the chief reason that this value has changed to its final state. The sentence composed from these two elements, Value plus Cause, expresses the core meaning of the story. Value means the primary value in its positive or negative charge that comes into the world of life of your character as a result of the final action of the story. For example: An up-ending *Crime Story* (IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT) returns an unjust world (negative) to justice (positive), suggesting a phrase such as "Justice is restored…"
>
> (McKee, 1998, p. 115-116)

This is problematic, because instead of clarifying the vague idea of 'theme', McKee replaces it with his concept of 'controlling idea' which is then further split into two further concepts, one of which, 'value' actually has two elements – abstract concept (essentially the same as the traditional concept of 'theme') and value judgment. McKee then adds a fourth element, 'cause', because:

> A story of substance also expresses why its world or protagonist has ended on its specific value. If, for example, you were writing for Clint Eastwood's *Dirty Harry*, your full Controlling Idea of Value plus Cause would be: "Justice triumphs because the protagonist is more violent than the criminals."
>
> (McKee, 1998, p. 116)

This is not to say that McKee is wrong, just that the framework seems unnecessarily obfuscatory. Yet even when applying the new concept of 'controlling idea', McKee cannot avoid concepts of argument, debate and dialecticism:

> You have to build a bridge of story from the opening to the ending, a progression of events that spans from Premise to Controlling Idea. These events echo the contradictory voices of one theme. Sequence by sequence, often scene by scene, the positive Idea and its negative Counter Idea argue, so to speak, back and forth, creating a dramatized dialectical debate. At climax one of these two voices wins and becomes the story's Controlling Idea.
>
> (McKee, 1998, p. 119)

Ultimately, the way McKee writes (or doesn't write) about argument, debate and didacticism in storytelling is reminiscent of the introduction to Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), in which the narrator tells readers: "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot." The protestation is in equal proportion to the true nature of the form.

***The Writer's Journey*, Christopher Vogler**

The Writer's Journey (Vogler, 1998) came in the wake of *Story* and is a shorter, much less dense work which mirrors its origins as an internal Hollywood memo that gradually expanded into the completed book (Vogler, 1998, p. xxix). As with all the literature examined here, *The Writer's Journey* is primarily concerned with craft, but unlike McKee, Vogler spends much less time discussing precisely what story is and why humanity needs it.

Designed on the model of the I Ching, with an introductory overview followed by commentaries that expand each stage, Vogler's work is built on the studies of Joseph Campbell in comparative mythology (2004). Vogler's book essentially outlines Campbell's theories and applies them specifically to feature film (although there is the occasional reference to reader's having used his work in television also (Vogler, 1998, p. 267). Vogler's take on the work is that the hero's journey, the monomyth that Campbell explores, can be used not just to structure, pace and characterize story, but also the life of the writer. As he states, "The Hero's Journey, I discovered, is more than just a description of the hidden patterns of mythology. It is a useful guide to life, especially the writer's life," (Vogler, 1998, p. 5).

Vogler claims myths are "…not an untruth but a way of reaching profound truth," (Vogler, 1998, p. 1) and that:

> All stories consist of a few common structural elements found universally in myths, fairy tales, dreams and movies. They are known collectively as The Hero's Journey… Used wisely, these ancient tolls of the storyteller's craft still have tremendous power to heal our people and make the world a better place.
>
> (Vogler, 1998, p. 3)

This assumption that stories make the world a better place does align Vogler with the central importance of the practice of telling worthwhile stories, although these ideas are not developed as his priority is to show how story manifests itself through character archetype and mythic structure. Vogler lays out seven archetypes: *Hero; Mentor; Threshold Guardian; Herald; Shapeshifter; Shadow;* and *Trickster* (although these forms owe as much to comparative mythologist Vladimir Propp (1968) as Campbell). Vogler also outlines twelve stages of the Hero's journey: *Ordinary World; Call to Adventure; Refusal of the Call; Meeting the Mentor; Crossing the First Threshold; Test, Allies, Enemies; Approach to the*

Innermost Cave; Supreme Ordeal; Reward; The Road Back; Resurrection; and *Return With The Elixir*.

For Vogler, this structure and archetypes represent the epitome of effective storytelling across all media:

> Stories built on the model of the Hero's Journey have an appeal that can be felt by everyone, because they well up from a universal source in the shared consciousness and reflect universal concerns. They deal with the child-like universal questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? Where will I go when I die? What is good and what is evil? What must I do about it? What will tomorrow be like? Where did yesterday go? Is there anybody else out there?
>
> (Vogler, 1998, p. 15)

These are all obviously questions of theme, and Vogler conceptualizes theme slightly differently to McKee:

> The Ordinary World is the place to state the theme of your story. What is the story really about? If you had to boil down its essence to a single word or phrase, what would it be? What single idea or quality is it about? Love? Trust? Betrayal? Vanity? Prejudice? Greed? Madness? Ambition? Friendship? What are you trying to say? Is your theme "Love conquers all", "You can't cheat an honest man", "We must work together to survive", or "Money is the root of all evil"?
>
> (Vogler, 1998, p. 95)

Perhaps unsurprisingly for a book highlighting structure, Vogler leads with *where* theme should be stated. His view of what theme is also suffers from some inconsistencies. First, he seems to regard theme as a singular abstract concept ("love"), then includes the point-of-view ("love conquers all"). Although here it is clear that he assumes that all stories have one singular central theme and point-of-view he notably, unlike McKee, does not add the third aspect of why ('love conquers all because…') It should also be noted that, like Seger and McKee, Vogler refers inconsistently to theme as both plural and singular, sometimes talking about the 'theme' of the film or the 'themes' of the film without clarifying whether he considers all stories to have one central theme supported by sub-themes or that stories can support multiple main themes simultaneously (Vogler, 1998, pp. 99, 248, 258, 266).

Vogler defines theme as "derived from Greek, is close in meaning to the Latin-based **premise** [his emphasis]. Both mean "something set before", something laid out in advance that helps determine a future course. The theme of a story is an underlying statement or assumption about an aspect of life," (Vogler, 1998, p. 111). He adds that "Knowing the theme is essential to making the final choices in dialogue, action and set dressing that turn a story into a coherent design. In a good story, everything is related somehow to the theme, and the Ordinary World is the place to make the first statement of the main idea," (Vogler, 1998, p. 112). This represents essentially all Vogler has to say on theme. Yet the influence of theme seems to be weakened to the point of inconsistency. If theme helps turns the story into a "coherent design", does it not *govern* all creative choices, rather than simply be "somehow related" to them'? It must be noted that the work on theme comes half-way into the book and is presented with less prominence than the character and structural theories, at best giving a sense that theme takes no precedence over other craft elements.

Aside from theme, Vogler does have a conceptualization of what story is that matches McKee: the idea of metaphor: "Then what is a story? A story is also a metaphor, a model of some aspect of human behaviour. It is a thought machine, by which we test out our ideas and feelings about some human quality and try to learn more about it," (Vogler, 1998, p. 1). The previously outlined issues with metaphor as a conceptualization of an entire story stand, and what is consistent with Vogler's overall thematic stance (and the stance of the screen industry in general) is the lukewarm terms used to express what narrative feature films do. Films sound quite harmless if all they do is 'test thoughts and feelings to learn more about them,' as oppose to convince audiences of an assertion.

As with McKee, Vogler has his own set of euphemisms that can be used instead of a film-as-argument vocabulary; he writes of 'metaphors or comparisons': "**The mythological approach to story boils down to using metaphors or comparisons to get across your feelings about life** [his emphasis]," (Vogler, 1998, p. 84); he writes of the 'dramatic point-of-view': "Of course, if your dramatic point of view is that life isn't fair and you feel justice is a rare thing in this world, then by all means reflect this in the way rewards and punishments are dealt out in the return," (Vogler, 1998, p. 253); he writes of 'attitude' and 'declarative statement': "The needs of your story and your attitude may dictate ending with the feeling of a period, an image or line of dialogue flatly making a declarative statement such as "Life goes on,"" (Vogler, 1998, p. 259); and he writes of 'mood' and 'chain of thought': "Many stories fall apart in the final moments. The Return is too abrupt, prolonged, unfocused, unsurprising,

or unsatisfying. The mood or chain of thought the author has created just evaporates and the whole effort is wasted," (Vogler, 1998, p. 257).

Whether it is McKee's 'metaphor' or 'living philosophy', or Vogler's 'attitude' or 'chain of thought', these terms when taken together describe the shape and function of argument without having to commit to the conceptualization of film-as-argument in any explicit way.

***Scriptwriting Updated*, Linda Aronson**

Scriptwriting Updated is perhaps the most practical of the five books examined here and most closely echoes the traditional 'self-help' book style. There are charts and diagrams and, wherever possible, Aronson delves into the specifics of how to apply the various theories including exercises for the would-be screenwriter. Like McKee, Aronson is also fearful of the execution of theme-led stories:

> Concepts and themes – say, poverty, parenthood, loss, ambition, or the insanity of war – are often behind the most passionate writing. Unfortunately, scripts based on strongly felt themes can be clumsily structured, clichéd, peopled with stereotypes, and prone to preachiness. The reason for this is that themes and concepts are intellectual entities and as such are governed by vertical thinking, which can very easily take over without the writer realizing.
>
> (Aronson, 2000, p. 35)

Notwithstanding the inconsistency of Aronson grouping a theme and point-of-view ("insanity of war") with what is otherwise a list of abstract singular concepts ("poverty", "loss", and so on), and unlike McKee, Aronson provides the writer a way to avoid problems of didacticism. Aronson divides human thinking into two categories: *Vertical Thinking* and *Lateral Thinking*. Using her terminology, Vertical Thinking is good at "keeping it real," (Aronson, 2000, p.8) and she lists nineteen separate things it is good at, including logic, structural instinct, learnt knowledge, technique, a socially conditioned world view, objectivity, sound judgment, caution, concentration and cliché. Alternatively, Lateral Thinking is good at intuition, inspiration, originality, energy, receptiveness to new ideas, writing emotion, associational tasks, subjectivity and melodrama (Aronson, 2000, p.8). Therefore, the exercises in the book push the writer when thinking about theme towards lateral thinking, not the vague notion of the 'irrational' that McKee references but does not develop (Mckee, 1998, p. 111).

Elsewhere Aronson conceptualizes screen narratives as fables. “Fables are useful models because as well as having compelling plots they possess strongly defined characters. Indeed, because the story of a fable is devised to illustrate the foibles of its main players, fable is always very powerfully character driven,” (Aronson, 2000, p.29). Interestingly, she doesn’t draw out the thematic implications of this, instead focusing on character.

Where Aronson branches into new territory not covered by the other gurus is her work on the expectation of the audience when it comes to the meaning of a screen narrative. When talking of films that fail to weave disparate narrative strands together, Aronson states that:

> Most audiences complain that while the films are often extremely good, they fizzle at the end and it is hard to know what they were ‘about’ or what ‘the point’ was… Another way to see it is that audiences seem to be seeking, effectively, a ‘moral’, even if that moral is bizarrely surprising (as in Pulp Fiction), immoral (as in Crimes and Misdemeanors), or depressing (as in City of Hope).
>
> (Aronson, 2000, p.187)

It is here that Aronson implicitly criticizes the narrowness of the form of both modern screen storytelling and art overall, perhaps laying blame at the feet of the modern audience:

> Some would say that audiences need to be re-educated in their expectations so that they do not expect a moral or closure, but instead believe that travelling the journey of the film is enough… But at present (and this could change) most audiences come to film, as to all art, for a parable or conclusion of some kind, and feel disappointed when none is given to them.
>
> (Aronson, 2000, p.187)

This admission that there is an expectation for a moral or a conclusion of some kind lends weight to the film-as-argument thesis, even if again Aronson does not define it by name.

Honourable Mention: *Dramatica*, Melanie Anne Phillips & Chris Huntley

Although Melanie Anne Phillips and Chris Huntley cannot be considered first-tier gurus, and *Dramatica* (2004) originated as a piece of software whose associated glossary of terms grew into a textbook, it is the only significant industry-facing book on screenwriting craft that

explicitly discusses the idea of film-as-argument. Phillips and Huntley class stories into two versions of argument. The first version of argument is classed as:

> …the progression of logistic and emotional meanings that combine to prove a story's message. A story's message is proven by a progression of logistic (dispassionate) and emotional (passionate) meanings which are created by the interactions of Character, Plot, Theme, and Genre. The dispassionate argument is the story's contention that a particular approach is the most appropriate one to solve a particular problem or achieve a goal in a given context. The passionate argument is the story's contention that one world view is better than another in terms of leading to personal fulfillment. An author can use his story's argument to convey his message directly, indirectly by inference, or by making an exaggerated argument supporting what he is against.
>
> (Phillips and Huntley, 2001, p. 6)

They contrast this with the particularly complex form they entitle Grand Argument Story (GAS):

> A story that illustrates all four throughlines (Overall Story, Relationship Story, Main Character, and Impact Character) and their every story point so that no holes are left in either the passionate or dispassionate arguments of that story. A Grand Argument Story covers all the bases so that it cannot be disproved. From the perspective that it creates, it is right. There are four views in a complete story which look at all the possible ways the story could be resolved from all the possible perspectives allowed; these are represented by the perspectives created by matching the four Throughlines with the four Classes (the Overall Story, Relationship Story, Main Character, and Impact Character Throughlines matched up with the Classes of Situation (Universe), Activities (Physics), Manipulation (Psychology), and Fixed Attitudes (Mind) to create the four perspectives of the particular story they are operating in). Every complete storyform explores each of these perspectives entirely so that their views of the story's problem are consistent and that they arrive at the only solution that could possibly work, allowing the givens built into the story from the start. When this is done, a Grand Argument has been made and there is no disproving it on its own terms. You may disagree with the story's givens, but as an argument it has no holes.
>
> (Phillips and Huntley, 2001, pp. 20-21)

Phillips and Huntley offer a third principal conceptualization of story. It is that of 'following the muse', which they describe as follows:

> A number of authors write with no intent at all. They apply themselves to recording their journey through a topic or subject or simply wander, musing. The resulting work is almost always open to all kinds of interpretation, yet may elicit strong emotions and conclusions in virtually everyone who observes the work.
>
> (Phillips and Huntley, 2001a, p. 18)

Obviously they are talking about stories in general (although the intent is to talk to the screenwriter) but both the opaque definitions and triple conception of story prevents the book from fully supporting the conception of social practice that this thesis is defending. The idea that a mainstream narrative feature film is the sort of thing that should aim at an inconsistent argument or simply represent a stream-of-consciousness inspired by one particular initiating idea is not fully compatible for the internal good of the practitioner being to move people in a worthwhile way to a conclusion worth having.

Conclusion

Be it due to commercial pressures or sincere focus, whatever 'angle' each book takes (respectively, first of its kind, practical guide, practical exercise guide, structure or mythic structure), each guru understandably has a strong emphasis on craft. If a would-be or even established screenwriter picks up one of their books, they have made the choice to tell stories and wants to know how to tell them better. It follows that they are unlikely to be interested in the deeper conceptualizations of the process. Like a mechanic who wants to fix a car, if they want to know how to fix the fan belt, it is not necessary (or required) for them conceptualize that they are *really doing* when they fix a car, or even how the fan belt interrelates to the rest of the machine.

However, the interrogation of the professional literature performed in this chapter demonstrates that the concept of film-as-argument is articulated in all but name, described by each guru (with the exception of Field) with different levels of priority and intensity, whether or not it is cognizant. The analysis has further demonstrated that in many cases the social practice this thesis is defending is likely to be cognizant by these gurus, but a full acknowledgment of film-as-argument is blocked by various concerns and anxieties, most

notably the avoidance of didacticism. The lack of acknowledgment is problematic, and significantly contributes to the tradition being largely incognizant overall.

5.2 Essential Directing Methodology: Key Texts

With regard to story (as opposed to other skills such as helping actors achieve believable performances) the director's job as head creative could be considered a remarkably straightforward one. It would in no way be intellectually or professionally contentious to regard this creative responsibility as essentially a process of *interpretation* and *adaptation*; directors interpret the script and then adapt the writing to the visual and audio form. The novelist and screenwriter Roald Dahl said of film director Lewis Gilbert, "What I admired so much about Lewis Gilbert was that he just took the screenplay and shot it. That's the way to direct: You either trust your writer or you don't," (Pulver, 2018). Playwright, screenwriter and director David Mamet is even more direct about the art of directing, that the director is the Dionysian extension of the screenwriter (1992, p. xv) and further, as somewhat of Kuleshov-effect fundamentalist, that directors tell the story through "a juxtaposition of images that are basically uninflected," (1992, p. 2).

In his paper *Directing for Cinematic Virtual Reality: how the traditional film director's craft applies to immersive environments and notions of presence* (2017), John Mateer provides a useful primary conceptualization of the director's role: that of 'transportation'. Originally designed to analyse written stories, transportation is a theory that is defined by Green and Brock (2000, p. 701) in their study *The Role of Transportation Theory in the Persuasiveness of Public Narratives* (which, in turn, takes Gerrig's description (1993, pp. 10-11) as a base). Green and Block describe transportation as "…the extent that individuals are absorbed into a story or transported into a narrative world". They conceptualize transportation into a narrative world "as a distinct mental process, an integrative melding of attention, imagery and feelings", and also believe that audiences "may show effects of the story on their real world beliefs," (Green and Brock, p. 701), a view which is complementary to the central thesis of this study.

In another example of how imprecise and flexible academic and professional story jargon can be, Mateer defines transportation as "…classically defined as 'suspension of disbelief' in film and 'presence' in VR" (Mateer, 2017, p. 17). However, French New Wave critic and co-founder of *Cahiers du Cinema* Andre Bazin used 'presence' to describe the idea that the viewer feels placed within the time/place as the cinematic narrative (Bazin, 1976).

However, whichever term is used, Mateer believes that "In both media, [conventional screen and VR] transportation is the primary responsibility of the director," (Mateer, 2017, p. 17).

'Suspension of disbelief', or the acceptance of fiction as reality, is perhaps the most common term used in a cinematic context, even though it was it originally invented by Coleridge to describe reading epic poetry (Coleridge, 2014, Chapter 14). It is also worth noting that Coleridge called believed it a 'willing' suspension, whereas more recently the view that it is 'unwilling' (Kivy, 2011, Chapter 7) has been suggested. Whether willing or unwilling, the consensus is that the director's role is a three-stage process: **interpretation**, **adaptation** and **transportation**. To formalize this further, in his goal to transfer the skills of a conventional screen director to a virtual reality (V.R.) director, Mateer also provides a useful summary of how this three-stage process is broken down:

> As discussed by Richards (1992), Weston (2003), Proferes (2013) and others, this starts with the director undertaking a detailed analysis of the script to:
>
> - Formulate a specific interpretation of the story
> - Define the overall theme and message based on the interpretation
> - Define how information will be revealed – does audience learn as the characters (or subjects, if documentary) do? Does the audience know more than the characters/subjects? Less? Etc.
> - Define the overall objectives of core characters/subjects and the dynamics between them – whose story is it? What do they want? What do they need? Who are the allies? Enemies? Etc.
> - Extract story elements to inform realization and creative production choices (i.e. the director's vision)
>
> (Mateer, 2017, p. 18)

Therefore, with transportation as the goal, the director interprets and adapts. Mateer adds that, "Creation of 'mood' or 'tone' is readily accomplished through strategic choices in setting, production design, costume, lighting, sound and other presentational attributes as well as through blocking, pacing and delivery of performances or portrayal of activity," (Mateer, 2017, p. 18).

Mateer credits *verisimilitude* as the key techniques necessary for transportation to be achieved (Mateer, 2017, pp. 18-21). This is "the enabling of viewers to mentally construct

compelling realities irrespective of the fidelity of pictorial or aural representations of story events"), *continuity* ("continuity of viewpoint' continuity of motion; continuity of setting: continuity of sound"), and the concept of *organic direction* ("whereby production choices made are motivated based on a consistent interpretation of story elements, setting and character that are logically supported by script analysis. Each aspect of the production needs to reinforce others to create a coherent virtual world with clear 'rules'").

In terms of specific camera/sound techniques providing specific results with audiences, these will be discussed in depth in the case studies chapters of this study. Below is simply a brief summary of the key techniques a director has at their disposal to tell their story. Such a list is possible because although many feature film directors have their own variation or style when it comes to either behaviour on set or shot design, and even though the techniques steadily evolve, the fundamentals of mainstream film grammar are uniform. These fundamentals are based on a century of empirical analysis by industry with the global audience as the sample group. As Daniel Arijon states in his book *Grammar of the Film Language*, "If any value is to be found in their rules, it is that they are the production of experimentation, an accumulation of solutions found by everyday practice of the craft," (Arijon, 1991, p. 2). The film director Frank Capra regarded film as "…one of three universal languages, the other two: mathematics and music" (Edgar-Hunt, Marland and Rawle, 2010, p. 7).

The summary is not a sociological, cultural or economic investigation of filmmaking practices, as those approaches are beyond the scope of this study. It is essentially a review of film linguistics, a short uncontroversial précis of the director's 'toolkit' in order to provide a foundation for the defence of the film-as-argument thesis. It is based on the books that represent the most well-referenced and therefore professionally influential industry-facing summaries. These are: *Film directing Shot by Shot: Visualizing from concept to screen* (Katz, 1991)*; Grammar of the Film Language* (Arijon, 1976); *Directing: Film Techniques & Aesthetics* (Rabiger, 2008); *On Filmmaking* (Mackendrick, 2004) and *Film Art: An Introduction* (Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, 2018). It must be noted that although the director ultimately is concerned with the *intangible* (story, theme, tone, audience response), these represent the *tangible* elements that must be manipulated.

The Director's Toolkit

Shot Size

Shot Size refers to how large an object appears in the frame. As Katz mentions, "the universal units of composition are the long shot, the medium shot, and the close-up," (Katz, 1991, p. 121). There are various other in-between sizes (medium close-up, for instance) and Katz admits that the precise definitions of each size is variable: A close-up is usually from the neck up, the medium shot about waist up and a long shot is the whole body.

A long shot is usually used to show context. This can be for purely informational reasons, but can also be used effectively to convey emotions such as loneliness.

A close-up is used to help the audience connect emotionally with the character, the bigger the eyes the more they are likely to connect and get a sense of an internal life (Katz, 1991, p. 123): a front-on angle has the most impact, providing the whole face and two eyes, as the face turns away from the camera into profile, the impact is diminished. A profile shot invites the face to be examined as an object rather than related to as a subject, (Mackendrick, 2004, p. 225).

A medium shot provides more intimacy than a long shot and more contextual information than a close-up: it is a useful jack-of-all-trades shot that has functioned as the 'workhorse' for dialogue scenes throughout the sound period (Katz, 1991, p. 127). It is also a dominant shot size in comedy, as comedic performances require less emotion and a sense of bodily movement.

Camera Height

The camera can be positioned at a neutral height (usually approximately the eye-height of the characters). However, if the camera is positioned significantly lower than the eye-height, this can result in the actor be presented in an unflattering way (most people do not look good from below, usually this gives an individual a double chin) but when used in a Medium or Long Shot is used to make a character look stronger or heroic. Shooting an actor from above is usually used to make them look weaker.

Composition

It must also be noted that the precise framing of each shot size is usually determined by the conventions of post-Renaissance art, defined by what the human eye considers 'pleasing' in the frame (Katz, 1991, p. 123).

The guide the viewer's eyes around the frame, Mateer (2017) summarises the following widely-used tools of differentiation: Differences in grouping; Differences in colour; Differences in scale; Differences in shape; Differences in visibility; and Differences in motion. He also offers the example of Spielberg directing the Normandy landing scene in *Saving Private Ryan* (1998):

> Spielberg made the choice that Miller would not be wearing his helmet, thus visually offsetting him… Second, Spielberg blocked the scene so that Miller was the only person approaching camera and the camera also moved to him… These choices are wholly consistent with the 'reality' Spielberg sought to portray yet also facilitated his control of viewer perspective, empathy and attention.
>
> (Mateer, 2017, p. 22)

How characters, objects and backgrounds are laid out in the frame is a strong tool for the director, and the post-Renaissance rule of thirds for comfortable composition can be used or subverted for various effects. Frames can be cramped to make the audience feel claustrophobic, bare to make them feel emotionally barren or overly symmetrical to imply a sense of formal theatrical design and the hand of the filmmaker. Wes Anderson is an excellent example of the latter approach (for example, in *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, 2014). Composition can be used to make us like or dislike a character in the most subliminal of ways (whenever we see them on screen, the framing is dissatisfying), or believe a couple should or shouldn't be together (always in the frame together).

Lenses

All lenses distort the image to a greater or lesser degree and in addition to focal lengths, can capture laser-sharp or slightly softer images, depending on the age and construction of the glass used.

Long lenses are regarded as 'flattering' the human face, as they compress space front-to-back to make noses shorter and eyes less deep-set. Wide lenses expand space front to back, resulting in 'unflattering' images. In this way, the director can again temper the audiences' desire or connection to a character simply by way of the lens used (Rabiger, 2008, p.359). Most mainstream romantic-comedies shoot mainly on long lenses and much dystopian science-fiction priorities use of wide angles. Terry Gilliam (*Brazil*, 1985, *Twelve Monkeys*, 1995) is a prominent proponent of the wide-angle close-up to help create dystopian worlds.

Camera movement

Arijon (1976) has twenty basic rules for camera movement, as "the moving camera… can so easily destroy illusion", (Arijon, 1991, p. 380) and therefore transportation. Cameras can now move on any plane, smoothly (on tracks, jibs, cranes or steadicam) or less smoothly (hand-held). The movement can be subtle and disguised, as per standard 'invisible' classical Hollywood continuity rules (Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, 2018) or obvious and confronting. *The Hunger Games* (Ross, 2012) was critically derided for using overly extreme handheld techniques to dizzying effect. Though not a physical movement, the use of 'zooming' (magnifying the image during a shot) is another technique possible.

However the director chooses to move the camera, the decision is based on whether to engage the audience intellectually (panning to reveal elements of a location needed for plot purposes), emotionally (tracking in to connect us to a certain character's epiphany) or sexually (the jib shot up the female body in order to sexually objectify her (Mulvey, 1975)).

In each film the camera has a personality, which although intangible is revealed through tangible camera technique. Rabiger (2008, p. 461) succinctly outlines the concept that the camera is a 'concerned observer': sometimes smart, sometimes stupid but always an intelligence making decisions about what the audience should see. This is perhaps best demonstrated in the Mel Brooks satire of Hitchcock films, *High Anxiety* (1977): the camera films two plotting villains from underneath a glass coffee table. As they lay down their cups and saucers the camera has to subtly reposition to maintain the shot. As it becomes clear that the characters are aware of the presence of the camera and lay down unrealistic amounts of crockery to spoil the shot, the camera is forced to *nervously* then *manically* reposition.

Lighting

Lighting is highly influential in the setting of mood and (along with composition, where a character is looking and movement) to direct the eye of the viewer. In *Suspicion* (1941), Hitchcock famously put a light in the cup of milk Cary Grant was carrying up the stairs to subliminally draw the audience's attention (Truffaut, 1985).

The dominant form of lighting in mainstream film is chiaroscuro lighting (Dalle Vacche, 2009). Originally the term was used to describe the use of extreme contrasts between light and shade for dramatic effect, but the modern usage – now often synonymous with the term chiaroscuro *modelling*, is the use of light and shade to make two dimensional artworks feel three-dimensional. Different genres have different lighting techniques that highlight the form: gritty crime thrillers or neo-noir films tend to use traditional chiaroscuro techniques of

stylized high contrast taken from German Expressionism whereas comedy will go for much 'flatter'-style lighting that draws little attention to itself. Lighting can be used to unify the emotion of a scene or used in counterpoint to the performance or dialogue of scene to indicate subtext.

Production Design

It must be noted that there is no 'mise-en-scene' (literally "placing on stage"), department on a professional set. Mise-en-scene traditionally refers to the combination of the organisation of everything before the camera: sets, cast, costumes, composition and lighting, which exists as discrete departments in the professional world.

Production Design refers to the entire art department that includes, set design, dressing and props. Each element is key to the storytelling. Take the example of a simple office: is it a pleasant or oppressive location? Fundamental design and architecture techniques (production designers typically have an architectural background, such as Ken Adam, production designer of many of the Bond films) will be used to define the emotional character of the filmed space. For instance, 'pleasant' could equate to a sense of space and colour, 'oppressive' to low ceilings and use of monotone (Rabiger, 2008, pp. 304-310).

Palette

Palette is not to be confused with the overall 'tone' of the film. Tone is a key intangible with which the director works, and if inconsistent or simply wrongly judged, can irrevocably undermine a film. Often directors are known for a consistent tone across their entire oeuvre, such as Wes Anderson (arguably a playful theatricality with a melancholy edge) or Guillermo del Toro (beautiful, brutal and magical).

Palette is certainly a key element of overall tone, but also part of the visual strategy of the film that includes the choice of camera, lens, film stock/digital format, grade (colour change/correction during post-production), production design, costume and lighting departments. Each colour and combination of colours has a specific emotional and psychological effect: reds and browns signify warmth, blues and whites are cold, deep colours indicate vibrancy and pastels calmness. Some films pick just one or two colours to dominate a film. For example *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (Ritchie, 1998) chose a strong sepia-tan-tint to all images (mostly added in the post-production grading process) to signify a 1970s 'retro' tone to a modern day story and *Payback* (Helgeland, 1999) used mostly blues and blacks to give a film noir feel to a colour palette.

Film Stock, Codecs & the Camera

The director's visual strategy also extends to the choice of either film stock (still used by many top filmmakers today such a Christopher Nolan and Quentin Tarantino) or digital format. How a picture is encoded is technically done via a 'codec' and there are many choices to be made as each manufacturer has their own proprietary codecs that claim superior image capture. In the days when film was dominant, Fuji film stock was famous for its vibrant greens and Kodak for its vibrant reds (Trachtman, 2012, p. 97).

There is a similar, if more complex relationship between codecs and it comes down to creative choice by the director in conjunction with the Director of Photography. This discussion is part of the discussion that includes the choice of camera and overall resolution of image. For reference, as of 2019, the typical cinema screen displays at what is referred to as '2k,' or an equivalency of 2000 lines of resolution. Most professional format cameras will shoot at between 1k and 4k, but now up to 8k is available. How each individual camera marries the optical elements (the physical light and the lens) with the digital process of encoding is subtly different and each camera can be programmed differently. All these choices are critical, as they affect how a film 'feels' the audience.

Editing & Transitions

How images are juxtaposed is a key part to cinematic storytelling. "Let the cut tell the story… You always want to tell the story in cuts. Otherwise you have not got dramatic action, you've got narration," (Mamet, 1992, p. 2). The dominant form of editing is 'continuity editing,' giving the audience the impression that the action on screen is consistent in time and space and hiding the technique of editing from the viewer. Daniel Arijon's book *Grammar of the Film Language* (1991) seeks to exhaustively categorise and outline every possible technique that can be applied to this style. One key technique of continuity editing is the 'cut on action,' whereby the edit is made during a movement, so the eye is distracted and the edit not noticed. Another standard technique is the use of transitions (referred to as 'film punctuation' by Arijon (1991, p. 579) and 'ellipses' by academics) such as the dissolve and fade to imply a change of time and/or space. However, any recent watcher of modern western mainstream film will see that the use of transitional effects are on the decline and used more in films that want to evoke a traditional feel (such as J. J. Abrams' *Star Wars, Episode VII: The Force Awakens*, 2015).

We are now living in the time of what David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (2007) refer to as *Intensified Continuity*, essentially classical technique intensified by use of quicker

cutting, juxtaposition of different lens lengths, closer framings and an overly mobile camera. Director Michael Bay (the *Transformers* films, from 2007) and Spike Jonze (*Her*, 2014) are both consistently use this technique.

Montage has long been held up as a technique unique to cinema, but as Katz (1991) notes, montage is a problematic term. "To the Europeans all editing is montage; to the early Soviet filmmakers, Kuleshov, Pudovkin, and Eisenstein, it meant their special brand of associative editing," (Katz, 1991, p. 325). At its most basic, montage is a film sequence that juxtaposes usually short shots to convey an overall meaning (often compressing time and convey a lot of information quickly). Katz conceptualizes it as a condensed narrative in and of itself. The filmmaker most famous for using montage was Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948). Eisenstein believed there were five types of montage (metric, rhythmic, tonal, associational and intellectual). He is most remembered for the latter, intellectual montage, where he saw it as "an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots," (Metz, 1974, p. 133) where the function of the montage was to evoke intellectual concepts and opinions. The effectiveness of the intellectual montage has been debated ever since. In his paper *October and the Question of Cinematic Thinking* (2013), Damian Cox argues that the value of intellectual montage "does not reside in the insertion of ideas into the minds of an audience, but in the experiential opportunity it affords an audience to enter the space of reasons alongside the filmmaker". In mainstream film the ambition of montage is far more modest, where montage is used often to truncate time with a clear overall cohesive (if simple) intended effect. Straightforward examples are those such as the 'falling in love montage,' the 'now I'm alone montage' (for both see *When Harry Met Sally*, (Reiner, 1988) or the Rocky training 'getting fitter' montage from any of the Rocky films (1976-). Most are usually set to non-diegetic score.

Sound Design

Sound Design encompasses the entire aural strategy for the film, which includes music in the same way the production design includes costume but does not actively create them (Rabiger, 2008, p. 204, Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, 2018, p. 270). Sound Design is typically split in to five areas: dialogue, foley, spot effects, atmosphere and music. Foley is often referred to as 'footsteps' as the foley artist primarily re-records footsteps and clothes rustles. Spot effects are discrete sound effects such as gunshots and door slams. In a typical mainstream feature film with a budget of over $1million US dollars, most of the sound the audience hears in a film is not recorded at source. Every sound will be replaced, including dialogue (called

'looping') so the sound designer has complete flexibility with regard to how to mix those sounds together for effect. The sound designer will treat all sounds in the film much like the composer treats instruments in an orchestra, to be used to affect mood and tone (Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, 2018, p. 270).

A very famous example of this is in *The Godfather* (Coppola, 1972) where Michael is about the make his first 'hit'. The noise of the train above the restaurant is used as a subconscious proxy for his own beating heart, the repetitive 'da-dum' sound of the train on the tracks getting louder and faster as Michael's moment of truth nears.

Sound is classed in two ways, and these terms whilst primarily academic are used in practical tuition books: Diegetic (existing in the world of the film) and Non-diegetic (sound that only the audience can hear). As with music, sound is an effective (and relatively low-cost) tool for the director to subliminally influence the viewer. As French film director Robert Bresson commented, "The eye sees, but the ear imagines" (Rabiger, 2008, p. 203). Sound is also the only aspect of the film that exists in true three-dimensions, physically surrounding the audience and quite literally bouncing off the walls.

Music

Bordwell, Thompson and Smith comment that, "Sound is often treated as an accompaniment to the images, but we need to recognize that it can actively shape how we understand them," (2018, p. 270). This is true of all sound, but especially of music which represents a distinct universal language of emotional information. If pathos is a key element to persuasion then film music (both diegetic and non-diegetic) is perhaps one of the most powerful of all the cinematic tools.

Music is typically used in a film to tell the audience how to interpret a scene emotionally (if someone falls over, is it supposed to be funny or tragic?) and referring back to the *Rocky* training montage sequences, these are very reliant on the music to tell the necessary story, as do most modern montage sequences. The sense of progression and triumph is being carried musically and to a lesser extent the edit, over and above the performance and visual design. To demonstrate the power of music, the viewer only has to substitute the music of the Rocky training montage with a score that is melancholy or tragic, for the images to begin to take on a poignant, rather than inspirational edge.

Film directors are well aware of the power of music on their films, perhaps the most extreme example of this being when director Norman Jewison reversed the usual methodology of the music being timed to the pictures when he allowed composer Michel

Legrand to compose the music first for the famous chess sequence in *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968), and then cut the scene to time with the music. The score was nominated for an American Academy Award for Best Soundtrack (Dawson, 2009, p. 92).

The Actor & The Character

Choosing the right *actor* is critical for the film director, especially the lead(s). The lead is not only necessary to attract the financing for a film, they also needed to both convince as the character and have the necessary intangible charisma to 'carry' the film (that is to be moment-to-moment engaging enough for the entire running length of the story).

As the screenwriting gurus outline, at the most fundamental level the *character* is a storytelling device like all the others listed here, albeit a very dominant form (this also includes the hair, make-up and costume departments). Characters communicate the story by their actions and reactions (and appearance) and in the case of the lead, their character arc carries most thematic weight of the film. As the study examined with Sinnerbrink in Chapter 2, the audience derives meaning from the shared cinematic experience of engaging with the perspectives of other (fictional characters) depicted in complex situations, moved to reflect on what they are seeing through emotional engagement and estrangement, moral sympathy and moral-cognitive dissonance (2018, p. 198).

Dialogue

It is perhaps ironic that dialogue is considered the least effective tool of cinematic persuasion (Seger, 1994, p. 129) as it is in the verbal realm where arguments can be made in the conventional sense, literally out of the mouths of the characters. Although film specializes in 'show, don't tell', dialogue is necessary for realism, nuancing of character and theme and inevitable exposition. David Mamet, famous for (usually expletive-ridden) dialogue himself regards it as simply the "sprinkles on the ice-cream," (Mamet, 1992, p. 72).

However, other screenwriters, such as Quentin Tarantino (*Pulp Fiction*, 1994), Joss Whedon (*The Avengers*, 2012) and Aaron Sorkin (*The Social Network*, 2010) are considered to have elevated dialogue to an art form in itself, with Hollywood screenwriter Scott Rosenberg (*Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*, 2017) going so far to claim that "…we're all just humming, Aaron Sorkin is the only one who's singing," (**2013**) yet these are the exceptions to the rule.

5.3 Conclusion

Dominant industry thinking does not include an overall conception as film-as-argument for either screenwriters or directors. Practical screenwriting literature prioritizes on individual craft elements (structure, dialogue, character) rather than focusing on the practice as a whole and practical directing literature conceptualizes the director's job as one of interpretation, adaptation and transportation, where the creativity based on translating a pre-existing work.

As the first section of this chapter demonstrated, an account of film-as-argument was described in all but name in the industry screenwriting literature. The directing literature adds very little to any overall conception of the craft as a social practice due to the primarily translative nature of the work. The director has far more tools to use than the screenwriter, but it is to the same ultimate end. Yet the director is responsible not simply for transportation, but for a particular kind of transportation. They are seeking to establish a point of view, and a point of view is a necessary accompaniment to an argument; in an argument, they do not simply have people doing things before an audience, *they have them making a point for the appreciation of an audience*. This is what the various techniques outlined serve.

This can be best illustrated by highlighting the difference between 'photographing the action' and 'using the camera to tell a story'. Taking the scene of 'teacher lecturing to students', photographing the action would be shooting merely the most functional of coverage (close-up and medium shot of teacher, wide-shot master of the classroom, wide shot reaction of the students, one or two close-ups of key students for more nuanced reactions). Any professional director would be able to do this with no further recourse to the script other than understanding the physical and spatial relationships between the on-screen players. However, all of the dominant texts examined in this chapter stress the need not simply for the physical actions to be covered but for the intangible elements to be communicated also, essentially (but not limited to) the subtext of each scene. This is 'using the camera to tell the story'- the way the director uses the tools as their disposal (not just the camera) to communicate the key point of the scene, usually not clear from physical and spatial relationships alone. But why? Transportation would take place whether or not this strategy was used. It would augment the drama, certainly, but as the previous chapters have demonstrated, untethered drama – be it as entertainment, emotional manipulation or knowledge assimilation does not hold with the demonstrable traditions of the practice. The drama serves the transportation, the transportation serves the point of view, and the point of view is an integral element of the argument.

Rabiger's concept of the 'concerned observer' (2008, p. 461), the intellectual and emotional prism through which the audience sees the film, consciously making choices as to what is viewed and heard, is perhaps the best example of a tool that lays bare the distinction between tangible technique in the service of intangible elements. Whether the concerned observer is conceptualised as the 'camera', the 'film' or the 'director', it is a distinct consciousness that sits between the audience and the images and sounds, representing, if sometimes wholly disguised, an indisputable (as well as quite literal) point of view. As the following chapters will detail, the tools of the director's trade only really make sense in the light of film-as-argument; the tools of the argument-maker.

In Chapter 4, the question was posed as to why the thesis defends an account of a singular internal good of the practice, rather than attempting an approach that comprises multiple goods? The answer is twofold, both of which are consistent with the critical hermeneutic nature of the study. First, as this chapter has demonstrated, the significant industry literature as defined by Conor (2014), which represents the orthodoxy as a whole, all defends a singular conception of the internal goods of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking. Although these conceptions are not articulated as internal goods and often seem to compete with the thesis – the authors are wholly convinced that there is *one* underlying purpose to the social practice, be it to answer how a human being should live their life (Mckee, 1998, p. 11), make the world a better place (Vogler, 1998, p.3) or to provide a moral (Aronson, 2000, p.187). Second, an interrogation of the films themselves lend substantial weight to, and is consistent with, this singular conception and will be demonstrated with key case studies in Chapters 7 & 8.

Chapter Six

Why Failures Succeed – The Cinema of Compensation

6.1 Definitions of Success

It is a quirk of this thesis that, as it is concerned with narrative film as social practice rather the ontological declaration of what narrative feature films *are*, that the majority of completed mainstream narrative feature films can 'fail' yet still support the thesis. In the following chapters the study will analyse, with recourse to examples and putative counter-examples, precisely how film-as-argument functions successfully, but it is equally necessary to outline how precisely the failures manifest. This is a pertinent question as failures, as defined by this thesis, represent the majority of mainstream narrative feature films produced – yet the industry survives. A full account of this apparent anomaly is necessary if the case for film-as-argument is to convince.

To begin, a more precise definition of failure is required. Currently feature films are classed as 'successful' in two non-mutually exclusive categories: (1) Critical Success (liked by critics, both professional and amateur); and (2) Financial Success (liked by audiences to the degree that they are willing to pay for the experience of seeing the film in the cinema or on other platforms). However, as regards this thesis a film is only regarded as successful if it fulfils the single criteria of (3) Moving an audience to worthwhile conclusion in a worthwhile way. Obviously, this conception is compatible with (1) and (2), and a case could be made that if a film is successful in (3) then (1) and (2) should follow, but with so many external factors involved in (1) and (2) such as marketing strategy, budget and timing of release, this can never be assured.

The mainstream industry is primarily concerned with (1), for without financial success there would be no industry, and to a lesser extent (2). The idea of the 'prestige picture' has been around since the early studio era (*Time*, 1937), where a modest financial loss is deemed acceptable payment for the perception of an institution that cares about less popular but worthy creative voices. Such a perception, amongst other things, helps attract key talent

(primarily directors and stars) to that institution and projects that enable (1), and so the cycle continues.

Furthermore, by the definition of success (3), not only is it possible for some films to fail, but inevitably most films will fail to varying degrees, be they attempting to move people to a worthwhile conclusion in an inefficient or overly manipulative way (examples of this explored later in this chapter), moving people in a worthwhile way to a conclusion that is not worthwhile or both.

The Cinema of Compensation is new conceptual work I have developed that itemizes and systematizes how mainstream narrative feature films can achieve (1) and (2) without fulfilling (3). Some films comprise almost completely of compensations and still achieve (1) and (2), depending on the depth of the compensations and other contextual factors. To achieve (3), to be a film-as-worthwhile argument without flaw, a film would contain no compensations whatsoever. Although it would require a new empirical study, a case could be made that one of the ways film institutions clash with practitioners is that they apply a system of compensations to every production, although they would likely conceptualize the methodology as 'insurances' against a 'bad' film (read: unentertaining or technically poor), as opposed to compensations for a flawed argument. With regard to incognizant practitioners holding other conceptions (be they highly developed, moderately formed or completely instinctive) of the practice as either 'just entertainment', 'just telling stories' or providing desire satisfaction, these conceptions have already been challenged in Chapter 4. When such conceptions dominate a project, practitioners are mistaking the sugar coating for the pill, or as this chapter describes it, the compensations for the argument.

6.2 Compensations as Insurances

Below is not a summary of tangible techniques and intangible choices that practitioners can employ to compensate for a flawed argument. Often the same elements would exist in a version of the film that was without flaw, so their application is not simply a matter of inclusion (although it can be) but of *combination* and *emphasis*.

A culinary example is particularly useful. Let us say for example that a mainstream narrative feature film is a chicken pizza. And let us say for purposes of simplification, the ingredients of a chicken pizza are a pizza base, tomato sauce, cheese, chicken and pepper. It was always conceived to be a chicken pizza, and if the qualities of the ingredients are good, it will be a flawless chicken pizza. This obviously represents the film-as-worthwhile-argument

(or even film-as-entertainment) without flaw. But what if there is a problem with the logic of the argument? Perhaps due to the influence from either the institution or a star actor, changes are made to the story that is not in the best interests of the production. What are the choices for the practitioner? Can the flaw be disguised? Can the audience be distracted? Or if they cannot be distracted can other elements work harder to compensate for what is an identifiable fault? Using the analogy, if the tomato sauce is bad, can more cheese disguise it? This is where emphasis comes into play. In film terms, and specifically taking the comedy genre, this could mean that if story logic is lacking, the gags will need to be funnier; not ideal, but ultimately a likely satisfying compensation.

But what if, going back to our pizza, the extra cheese is not helping, the chicken is not making up for it and the pepper is making no impact? Then new ingredients will have to be added. Now it becomes a matter of both emphasis and inclusion. Perhaps the chef now adds high quality ground beef, pepperoni and bacon to make it a meat feast. The pizza now tastes wonderful, and in one way is a successful dish, but as it was never intended to be a meat feast it still represents a failure to the chef (and other chefs), namely that the great meat feast is really just a failed but artfully disguised chicken pizza. Going back to our comedy, if the story logic is lacking and the gags are not compensating (be it at script or shooting stage), this might mean adding new cast members that are particularly famous whom were never initially intended to be an element in the film – perhaps making it an ensemble comedy. If these new high-profile cast members make the necessary impact, it means that even if the film is both critically and commercially successful, for the practitioners it really represents a failed non-ensemble comedy. *Annie Hall* (1977) is an example of a significant critical and commercial hit that was nevertheless a disappointment to the writer and director Woody Allen. The original cut didn't even feature the character Annie Hall as a central character (Faraci, 2012).

So how to tell if a compensation is a compensation rather than a bona-fide element of sound film-as-worthwhile argument storytelling? This process is rather more straightforward: **if the element is integral to the storytelling it is not a compensation.** Determining whether an aspect of a film is a compensation as the study defines it involves answering a series of questions: (1) Is the film's argument significantly flawed? (2) Does the aspect in question improve audiences' experience of the film or improve the film's marketability? If the answer is yes to both (1) and (2), then the aspect is likely a compensation. But there is the possibility that, although the film's argument is weak, the aspect under consideration nonetheless plays a crucial role in it. In this case, the aspect isn't a compensation (in spite of the fact that it improves things). It is still a part of the argument. So, consider this follow up question. (3)

Would the film's argument be further weakened or indeed undermined if the aspect of the film in question were removed or substituted with a non-compensatory equivalent? If the answer to (3) is no, then the aspect in question is a compensation. If the answer is yes, then the aspect in question is a part of the argument, whatever its merits, not a compensation for a failed argument. Of course, if a film (such as a typical exploitation film) entirely fails to present an argument, then this final question is moot; whatever improves the film is a compensation for the fact that the film is fundamentally pointless.

To use the celebrity cameo (sometimes referred to 'stunt' casting in the trade) as an example of a compensation, the subtraction test (3) above does not mean that the *role* disappears when the element is removed, just the celebrity aspect of the role. For instance, veritable superstars Kanye West, Harrison Ford, Liam Neeson, Jim Carrey, Marion Cotillard, Kirsten Dunst, Vince Vaughn, Sacha Baron Cohen, Will Smith, Tina Fey and Amy Poehler all appeared in the 'clash of the news anchors' scene at the end of *Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues* (McKay, 2013). Whilst it was necessary to have other anchor *characters* in the scene, it was not necessary for them to be *celebrities*, therefore it is an example of a compensation by way of emphasis (if the roles themselves were not necessary for purposes of argument, then it would be compensation by way of addition). However, if the comedy of the film were based around the idea of celebrity cameos (such as the TV shows *The Larry Sanders Show* (1992-1998) or *Extras* (2005-2007)) then the celebrity element would be simply a core part of the storytelling.

The compensations are listed and explained in depth below. An attempt has been made to be as exhaustive as is reasonably possible, with the various elements determined by recourse to reflective practice, industry and academic discourses, and technical and formal trends. Essentially the approach was to endeavour to define the meaningful 'atoms' of a mainstream narrative feature film: the element is included if, however intangible, it can be isolated and potentially leveraged to compensate for flawed argument.

1. Happy Endings

In his book *Happy Endings in Hollywood Cinema: Cliché, Convention and the Final Couple*, James MacDowell comments that, "The Hollywood 'happy ending' is among the most over-utilised and under-analysed concepts in discussions of popular cinema" (2014, p. 1). As MacDowell notes, although happy endings are clearly not limited to Hollywood, the term 'Hollywood ending' is primarily used as a pejorative term, implying that the end to the

narrative has not merely ended happily but at the expense of realism, even if judged solely from within the logic of the story world.

Herein lies the difference between a happy ending which is not a compensation, and a happy ending that is nothing but a compensation; the former is a fully integrated element, the latter an addition that lacks consistency. David Mamet takes an Aristotelian view of endings, in that a perfect ending is one that is surprising yet inevitable (Mamet, 2003), which is another way of saying that the close of the film works for both the drama and the argument. The 'surprise' supplies the necessary impact that drama requires, the 'inevitable' indicating a wholly logical argument, which once laid out is deemed logically faultless.

Examples of Hollywood institutions interfering in the endings of mainstreams feature films are ubiquitous and well catalogued. Previously the study has discussed Tom Cruise's *Risky Business* (Brickman, 1983), where the original ending sees Cruise's character Joel suffering for his dalliance with a prostitute by not getting into Princeton and being found out by his parents. The ending was altered on the studios' proviso (Warner Brothers): Joel gets into Princeton with his parents none the wiser. However, this intervention, perhaps counter-intuitively, illustrates that it does not necessary follow that a sad or bittersweet ending converted 'eleventh-hour' into a happy ending, is necessarily a Hollywood ending; it could be just the right course correction that gives the film the Mamet/Aristotelian ending. Happy does not always mean Hollywood. In this case, the change was successful, perhaps due to its being a more conventional choice that is more consistent tonally with the exciting, aspirational story that preceded it. The new ending may have in fact given the film a more consistent argument, although critically *not* one the practitioners initially set out to make.

The more recent film *Get Out* (Peele, 2017) did precisely the same thing, also changing its 'sad but fair' ending, this time due to the election of Donald Trump. Framed as a horror-satire, instead of Chris, the African-American protagonist defeating the antagonists but going to prison (a comment on issues of institutionalised racism within the penal system), he now defeats the antagonists before being picked up by his best friend (with no threat of prison hanging over him). The thoughts were that the target audience needed a bit more cathartic joy (Peele, 2017, director's commentary), which the new modified happy ending provided, with only minimal changes. These 'compensatory' endings are of note, as the compensation itself destroys the argument in pursuit of wish-fulfilment. It compensates, not for a flawed argument, but perhaps a difficult truth, by changing the argument. If the argument that is substituted is close enough to the original (thus a consistent argument in line with all previous

narrative choices) then the audience will accept it. However, these examples are the exception rather than the rule.

A more typical example of the happy ending as Hollywood ending as compensation-that-fails is a film like *L.A. Confidential* (Hanson, 1997) which is also an example of the double-ending; literally a film which tries to have both the honest and happy ending one after the other. Here, Bud, the anti-hero played by Russell Crowe, is shot multiple times in the penultimate sequence. Based on the verisimilitude of the world set up, there is little doubt that no human could survive. It is the ultimate act of sacrifice for a character on a redemptive path. The villains are all caught and duly punished, and the tone is one that is deliberately melancholic and undeniably final. Yet the real final (and surprise) image is of Bud in a car at the end, so heavily bandaged up to be almost comedic, but clearly on the mend. It is clearly an addition, and unlike the previous examples, one that is inconsistent with story logic. Another, quite unique, application of the double ending is that of FW Murnau's German Expressionism masterpiece *The Last Laugh* (1924). In this case, the hero's logical yet wholly depressing demise is faithfully rendered, only for a title card to appear (at one hour, twelve minutes and seven seconds into a film that runs for one hour and twenty-four minutes), stating that "Here our story should really end, for in actual life, the forlorn old man would have little to look forward to but death. The author took pity on him, however, and provided quite an improbable epilogue". This Brechtian breaking of the fourth wall, the admittance from the 'author' that in real life the character would have a miserable end but that they have the power in fiction to give them a happy ending (he wins the lottery) is a very rare cinematic example of the *honest* double ending, albeit one that involves a radical change of storytelling strategy.

So why the fascination with the happy ending at all costs? In an ultimate piece of meta-casting, in Spike Jonze's *Adaptation* (2002), about a screenwriter struggling to write and adaptation, Jonze casts Brian Cox as Robert McKee who gives the screenwriter some mentorly advice (at 1 hour, 8 minutes and 27 seconds on the 2003 Columbia Tri-Star DVD edition): "Wow them in the end, and you got a hit. You can have flaws, problems, but wow them in the end, and you've got a hit. Find an ending, but don't cheat". Here, the character of McKee is explicitly telling the screenwriter that a 'wow' ending can literally compensate for everything else. Yet the use of the obscure 'wow' betrays the fact that it is not necessarily a happy ending but the 'right' ending. This right ending is not additive or compensatory but hardwired into the DNA of the argument. However, 'right' endings are notoriously difficult to land, dependent on all that has gone before them, whereas happy endings are quantifiably prescriptive – the protagonist(s) get what they want. The widespread use of the happy ending

in Hollywood is perhaps the ultimate act of creative pragmatism: if a film is to have an unconvincing ending, a happy one is preferable to an unhappy one.

It must also be noted that the happy ending is just one tool, and it forms part of an overall set of genre expectations. In a children's adventure, an action film or a romance for instance, the happy ending is a foundational element of the fiction. However, in a drama, especially a tragedy, the happy ending could be considered to be a break with genre conventions. This is especially true of practitioners such as Michael Haneke (see *Amour*, 2012 and *Funny Games*, 1997 and 2007) and Bela Tarr (see *Werckmeister Harmonies*, 2000 and *Damnation*, 1987). In these cases, the happy ending could not be used as a compensation, and other techniques would have to be applied.

2. Franchise

In same the way that, based on the primary source of income, cinemas can be considered as sweet shops with screens (Tuttle, 2009), it would take very little re-orientation to consider the traditional Hollywood studios and large global streaming services (Netflix, Amazon, Facebook and Apple) as being not in the film industry but the franchise industry (Yeo 2017, Arnold 2017). According to Boxofficemojo.com As of January 2020, *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997) is one of only two films in the top ten grossing films of all time not to be part of a franchise; the other film, *Avatar* (2009) is poised to become one with a number of sequels being prepared.

The franchise is one of the most effective compensations, because the film in question can fail to work on any creative level yet there will always be market interest. Although it appears some film franchises do die (The *Matrix* series, 1999-2003), in reality they are merely dormant until 'rebooted' a generation or generations later (in late 2019, the fourth *Matrix* film was announced), depending on perceived market forces. Sometimes these reboots, re-imaginings or belated sequels return quickly to the mire (*The Lone Ranger*, 2013, *Charlie's Angels*, 2019), others receive a new lease of life (The *Mission: Impossible* series, 1996-). And if they do fail, another attempt can always be tried in the unspecified future, as the Planet of the Apes franchise demonstrates. Based on Pierre Boulle's book *La Planete des singes* (1963) the first film was released in 1968, with four more sequels released to ever diminishing budgets and returns (Kaye, 2014) until 1973. There were two television series screened between 1974-1976 but the franchise effectively shuttered at the close of 1976. In 2001 the franchise attempted a return with Tim Burton's 'reimagining' or 'reboot' (essentially a reworking of the source material not consistent with the universe building of the original

incarnations) also entitled *Planet of the Apes*, but with dismal reviews and box-office, again the franchise was abandoned. Ten years later in 2011, Rupert Wyatt directed the latest return with *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*, and this time the franchise was resurrected successfully and has to date spawned two more sequels, *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (Reeves, 2014), and *War for the Planet of the Apes* (Reeves, 2017).

Obviously, if the franchise is strong enough, it can compensate for every element of the film and therefore represents the ultimate insurance for any film financier. This is clearly the rationale behind modern Disney's aggressive acquisition of the most proven and financially successful franchises in modern cinema history: the *Star Wars* and *Marvel* universes, as well the studios Pixar and Fox, with resulting character, story and merchandising sub-franchises too numerous to list.

However, to best demonstrate the theorem, the D.C. cinematic franchise provides an illustrative case study. Perhaps the most highly anticipated superhero film (a battle between arguably the two most iconic comic-book characters of all time) *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (Snyder, 2016) was universally derided by critics and the public alike. It currently rates a 28% rotten score on industry review aggregator site rottentomatoes.com, comparable to the 85% that similar scope and scale superhero film *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018) received. However, despite the universal derision, the grosses of the film still totalled $873,634,919 (Boxofficemojo.com). This was considered an underachievement in an arena where grosses of over $1 billion are viewed as unspectacular, but without the support of the franchise (the narratively unnecessary additive element – the story would have been the same with two obscure superheroes with similar traits) the reviews may have been the same yet the grosses miniscule in comparison. The film does contain other compensations that will be explored in this chapter, but none as dominant as the franchise.

Can franchise ever exist as a smaller element of a film? It is rare, but the answer is yes. In fact, franchise functions as the *twist* in the M. Night Shyamalan film *Split* (2017). What is essentially a conventional Psycho-inspired serial-killer film is revealed in the final scene to be an origin story of a villain from the *Unbreakable* (Shyamalan, 2000) universe, thus setting up a new franchise from what was previously a standalone film. That this comes at the close of the narrative, the twist could function as both a franchise and happy ending compensation, depending whether or not analysis concludes that these represent additive elements to the film.

3. Genre Conventions

Genre, the 'type' of film that is made, is essentially a syntagm, an organizing structure containing paradigms (tropes and expectations) that need to be met and/or subverted if the film is to qualify for that particular category. To some degree this is a category of what will be explored later in this chapter as 'fan service', providing what the practitioners predict the knowledgeable fan of the genre or franchise wants at the expense of the argument.

This compensation formula can be stated thus, the more flawed the film, the more the need for genre expectations to be met. Genre expectations are usually certain events unfolding, but can also mean that certain events are specifically avoided (such as the happy ending in an otherwise subversive European art-house film, as discussed above). The more genre expectations that are met, and the more these tropes are well-executed (in a horror, that the scene-by-scene 'jump scares' are genuinely jumpy and scary) the more they will compensate for flawed storytelling. If quality of execution of these conventions is not possible, then a clever subversion of these conventions is allowable, especially if they provide something new or unique to the genre (the horror film *Scream* (Craven, 1996) is an effective example of this, it's subversion/newness being that the film was actively self-aware of its own genre conventions – yet now this has become yet another genre convention). The Bond franchise has become almost a slave to those conventions over and above the usual spy-action-thriller conventions that it helped to establish (imagine a Bond film *without* the meeting with M, the big explosion at the end, the seduction of the 'Bond girl' (usually two, divided into 'good' and 'bad' variations) and the exposition of the chief villain) but at the budget those films require, safety is a key concern. These elements comprise compensations as the argument of these films (usually a variation on 'natural justice will succeed') rarely require the meeting with M, the seduction of the two Bond girls or the exposition of the chief villain.

4. Casting & Performance

This compensation is split into three closely interrelated categories: the level of *star*, the level of *attractiveness* and the level of performance. The level of star is perhaps the simplest to quantify with recourse to statistics regarding level of media attention and the fees offered for their services, but the level of attractiveness and performance can be assessed in a similar way: the perception of beauty and talent as defined (rightly or wrongly) by recourse to both traditional media and social media commentary.

The star is perhaps the most well-known of the industry insurance techniques, as it is the easiest to execute. The equation is simple: as long as the star appears in the film, there will be interest (and sales) even if no element in the film works. It is the primary reason the fees demanded by stars are so high. On a fundamental level, the star often operates *as* the genre. Usually star and genre work in unison, and depending on the star this can be a necessity, as some stars only function as such in certain genres (audiences usually accept Tom Cruise in dramas and action-thrillers but Jim Carrey has only sporadically managed to be accepted outside of comedies, and these films have attracted far less critical and commercial success). As regards specific examples, it could be argued that the use of a star is *always a compensation*, as it is a purely contextual benefit, with nothing within the story world itself requiring that particular character to be played by a star. The only exception to this would be if the star were playing themselves, such as Bruce Willis in *Ocean's 12* (Soderbergh, 2004) or John Malkovich in *Being John Malkovich* (Jonze, 1999).

Alternatively, the compensation can be based purely on the perceived level of attractiveness of an actor or star. The study will examine visual pleasure overall as a compensation later in this chapter, but all actors' careers are based on their looks whether they are Danny DeVito or Jennifer Lawrence. Actors are traditionally split into two categories, leads and character actors (often used as a euphemism for 'an actor who is not generically attractive enough, by whatever cultural standards that dominate the industry, to be considered as a lead'). However, it is possible to move categories depending on genre, as an actor such as Paul Giamatti demonstrates (lead in independent drama *Cold Souls* (Barthes, 2009), and support player in disaster-action-epic *San Andreas* (Peyton, 2015).

Teen comedy is a genre that is not star dependent but does rely largely on the overall attractiveness of its cast to appeal to critics and audiences. The epitome of a successful teen franchise is the *American Pie* series of films (1999-2012). Unlike teen comedy franchises of the past, such as *Porky's* (1981-1986) whose casts consisted of more 'realistic' looking individuals, the *American Pie* performers seem to be exclusively (unless the character has to have a certain physical attribute for a gag) cast from a pool of fashion models. Clearly the story is not predicated on the teenagers in the film being hyper-attractive, so potentially it is a clear-cut case of *attractiveness-as-compensation*. The only way that the extreme attractiveness could be viewed as integral to the overall piece is for the attractiveness to be a significant genre trope and expectation, therefore the film is merely playing by genre rules. However, in this case, an argument could be made that even if a higher level of attractiveness was expected in the teen genre, the *American Pie* series surpasses even this.

It should also be noted that the reverse is true: the lack of attractiveness level can also serve as a compensation. The 'grossness' of certain characters in horror, such as the iconic 'Pinhead' in the *Hellraiser* series (1987-) or 'Freddy' in the *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984-2010) franchise demonstrates. Perhaps the best example of this is the notorious Tod Browning drama *Freaks* (1932), although this cast should not be regarded as a compensation, as their looks are intrinsic to the storytelling.

A more modern subset of the attractiveness compensation is the transformative role, usually a particularly handsome or beautiful actor genuinely physically altering themselves (usually making themselves less attractive) for the part. Robert de Niro is arguably the highest profile example of this when for *Raging Bull* (Scorsese, 1980) he gained large amounts of weight (and production was shut down for 5 months) to play boxing legend Jake LaMotta in the final years of his life. Former Batman actor Christian Bale lost what would be considered dangerous amounts of weight to play the insomniac lead in independent psychological-thriller *The Machinist* (Anderson, 2004), and more recently Matthew McConaughey lost similar amounts of weight to play HIV victim Ron Woodroof in *Dallas Buyers Club* (Vallee, 2013).

McConaughey is a useful case study for both the attractiveness and performance sub-categories as he won the American Academy Award for best actor for the role, but his transformation could very well be considered a compensation due to the *level* of weight that was lost. Performance is one of the most established compensations on the list, with individual performances commonly detached from the films they appear in for separate comment and critique, be it by academics, critics or the various national film institutions. However, it is possible for an actor, either through transformation or by performance style to *exceed* the needs of the story, and instead become a distraction, a breaking of the fourth wall, a modern version of the star over-performing or 'hamming' it up on stage, as they constantly demand to be the centre of attention even at the expense of the overall storytelling. In McConaughey's example, the role could have been played equally convincingly if the actor appeared very skinny, as opposed to the 'walking skeleton' he appeared. If the part were played by an actor unfamiliar to the general public it would not have formed a compensation as the audience would have no previous image for comparison, but with a star of McConaughey's profile, the extreme transformation adversely affected the storytelling.

5. Author

This is a variant of both the franchise and star compensations, but this time applied to the practitioners themselves. Usually applied to the director ('from the director of….') and/or screenwriter ('from the writer of…') and sometimes the producer ('from the producer(s) of…'), and in what may be considered desperate times, even the *institution* ('from the production company that brought you…') these are all examples of using the practitioner as star or franchise. The use of producer or institution can be viewed as desperate as their involvement increasingly sophisticated audiences will be aware that their involvement is likely to be more 'arms-length' and less directly involved than the practitioners (there are of course, always exceptions to this, animation studio Pixar and its parent company Disney being two of them).

The author compensation cannot use the attractiveness quotient of the actor, instead relying in the interest due to the track record of success (critical or commercial) of the perceived creator of the work, problematic at best in an industry as necessarily collaborative as mainstream feature film. It is worthy of note that this concept of the credible source of the work (*ethos*) is also one of the three fundamental pillars in Aristotle's theory of persuasion referenced earlier in this study (along with *logos* and *pathos*).

This makes assessing whether or not the practitioner is being used as a compensation a particularly problematic issue. In one sense, the use of the 'previously critically or commercially successful author' can be *always* viewed as a compensation as it is not textual and does not have a direct influence on the storytelling of *that particular feature film* in any way. The alternative (that alas does not have the same marketing hook) would be to have a director or screenwriter that was equally capable in terms of skills base but not renowned in any way, such as an early career practitioner. However, the reverse could also be considered to be true, that by definition, the practitioner can *never be a compensation* as they are part of the initial DNA of the film, that their track record has a direct bearing on their skills base, that in the purest Aristotelian sense, the author – whoever they are – does have a bearing on the audience's engagement of the story or the argument.

Again, it is a matter of emphasis, and in this way, even Aristotle's three pillars of persuasion could be used as compensations, depending on their various flaws: if the logos is flawed and the pathos inadequate, the author needs to have significant gravitas to convince (perhaps be even a God of some kind).

Perhaps the test here is to consider emphasis in context. If the practitioner is heavily marketed in the promotion of the film to the exclusion of most else, this would indicate

compensation. Alternatively, if the storytelling is weak (using the Aristotelian persuasive definition of logic and engagement of the emotions and senses) over and above what would be considered normal for that practitioner or that the practitioner is not a good 'fit' for the material or is no longer a fully functioning practitioner due to either illness or age, then this could be considered a compensatory use. An example of an awkward fit is Robert Wise, a director who achieved his most notable successes as the director of large-scale musicals (*West Side Story*, 1961 and *The Sound of Music*, 1965), being given the task of directing the first big-screen outing of the Star Trek franchise with *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979). Whilst the appointment certainly brought a sense of gravitas to the production, the result was tonally at odds with the original series; a slow-paced epic rather than a fun adventure (Thomas, 2000).

6. Visual Pleasure

In her seminal work of provocation, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), Laura Mulvey wrote of 'scopophilia', the concept of obtaining pleasure from looking. (This overlaps but quite separate from *voyeurism*: the sexual interest or practice of watching private, intimate or sexual actions of others). Mulvey considered the gaze of the camera to be inherently male, and the visual pleasure based in a sense of sadism and possession of the image. She regarded Hollywood's construction of the image of the female star as "the ultimate spectacle" ('spectacle' is another compensation that will be examined later in this chapter) and refined her ideas (based on the concepts of Freud and Lacan) of the 'male gaze' into two modes: the voyeuristic (woman as image to be looked at) and the fetishistic (seeing woman as the substitute for 'the lack'/fear of castration).

Others, such as feminist critic Gaylyn Studlar (1991) argued the opposite, that visual pleasure is essentially a passive experience, and rather than based in sadism is actually driven by masochistic desires by an audience wishing to be powerless in the hands of the image.

These two academic ideas on the nature of visual pleasure sit on opposite ends of the theoretical spectrum and are used to illustrate that whereas the debates about *how* visual pleasure works are likely to be debated ad infinitum, there is general agreement that visual pleasure is gained by the audience experiencing cinema (in the theatre or other platforms) and is core to the cinematic experience.

As, by definition, all audiences are made up of individuals with their own nuanced tastes and desires, the definition of visual pleasure is necessarily fragmented; what one finds pleasurable another may not. Therefore this visual pleasure can be found in a variety of

categories, be it the pleasure in seeing: *cast* (the aforementioned teen comedies); *locations* (such as the rural Italian fields in *Stealing Beauty* (Bertolucci, 1996)); *machinery* (the *Transformer* series (2007-)); *light* (Malick's *Days of Heaven,* 1978); *colour* (the vibrant greens, yellows and reds in *Amelie* (Jeunet, 2001)); or *design* (Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel,* 2014) to name just a few examples. Even such things as the film stock or codec used to process the image can give a greater sense of visual pleasure. Visual pleasure can also come from choreography. Movement has long since been held up as a core essence of cinema, very much built into the very concept of the form; they are very literally 'moving pictures'. As Hitchcock said, "In many of the films now being made, there is very little cinema: they are mostly what I call "photographs of people talking."… I always try first to tell a story in the cinematic way…" (Truffaut, 1985, p. 61). Much joy can be had from the way that only moving pictures can juxtapose angle and motion; the Busby Berkeley musicals (1930-62) demonstrate this very efficiently – the shows may have come from a musical theatre tradition, but the iconic aerial shots of the synchronised dancers were wholly cinematic.

Again, in evaluating whether or not visual pleasure is being used as compensation is wholly down to degree and emphasis. Here, the *50 Shades of Grey* film franchise (2015-2018) is a useful case study. Originally erotic fan-fiction based on the *Twilight* book and film franchises (2005-2012) the book was released in 2011 and became a publishing phenomenon, selling 16.2 million copies (Kelly, 2020). Universal Pictures and Focus Features spent $40 million (US Dollars) on the first film adaptation (Boxofficemojo.com). The traditional actuarial calculations for feature films usually require a film to make back three times its budget to break even, which would mean that the film adaptation would have to make back $135 million US dollars just to stop the studios from making a loss. This obviously puts great pressure on the film and practitioners, especially as the vision of the books was clearly soft-core pornography but this particular genre of film would never generate the amount of income needed. Instead the film was shaped as a romantic drama with nudity (but not explicit sex), much like the mid-1990s thrillers written by Joe Eszterhas and often starring Sharon Stone *Basic Instinct* (Verhoeven, 1992) and *Sliver* (Noyce, 1993). However, thrillers often made huge profits, romantic dramas less so, and *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Taylor-Johnson, 2015) was a particularly high budget example of the genre.

As the ubiquity of pornography demonstrates, there is considerable visual pleasure to be had from showing explicit sex acts, the combination of scopophilia with traditional voyeurism being an effective combination. However, not being an option for the conventional

studios, it is clear from the resulting film that if the *actual* sex was to be minimized in a film series ostensibly *about* sex, then every other element needed to be beautified: faces, bodies, locations, lighting, production design. The strategy worked, with *Fifty Shades of Grey* making a large profit (as of January 2020, gross receipts stand at approximately $569,651,467 US dollars). However, this strategy may have worked financially but, as was noted by the critics, to the detriment of the story. As Joanna Weiss remarked in the Boston Globe (2015), "There are several kinds of porn in "Fifty Shades of Grey": house porn, clothes porn, closet porn, helicopter porn, all of them more interesting than the sex scenes that have caused so much breathless anticipation. Those come across as stiffly academic, a cataloguing of body parts and equipment. The passion is largely missing. The real appeal is the stuff."

It is clear from Weiss's quote that the word 'porn' is a euphemism for 'visual pleasure'. It is clear that the emphasis on the visual pleasure of every production element functions as their beauty is far in excess of the demands of the narrative and in fact they actually serve as a distraction from the story.

7. Spectacle

Again, there is nothing suspect about the use of spectacle in mainstream narrative feature films, but as McKee comments, "Flawed and false storytelling is forced to substitute spectacle for substance, trickery for truth. Weak stories, desperate to hold audience attention, degenerate into multimillion-dollar razzle-dazzle demo reels," (Mckee, 1998, p. 13).

Now how best to define cinematic spectacle? Here, the standard definition of the term is sufficient: 'a large-scale impressive display' (Dictionary.com, 2020). Obviously, this notion of spectacle limits which genres can use the technique effectively as compensation: dramas and comedies will find it much more problematic (yet not impossible – see *The Blues Brothers* (Landis, 1980) shopping-mall car chase for a notable example), to compensate-by-spectacle than action thrillers or historical epics. One useful rule-of-thumb would be to separate films into two categories: those where *movement* is a genre convention (such as running, car chases, general pursuits) and all others; the former will be able to leverage spectacle-as-compensation with far more consistency and degree of success. Even if used as a compensation McKee will likely accuse the writer of "mistaking kinesis for entertainment," (Mckee, 1998, p. 24).

Spectacle is not simply visual pleasure, but a sub-section of visual pleasure that relies on scale. The aforementioned *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Taylor-Johnson, 2015) was never spectacle, but the *Bond* series (1962-) employs it as a core genre convention; if the villain's

lair does not blow up in spectacular fashion at the close of the film, the practitioners risk riots in the aisles. It could also be argued that with the M.C.U. (the Marvel Cinematic Universe that currently comprises over twenty-three interconnected superhero movies) Disney/Marvel have used these separate spectacles to create one ever-building gargantuan spectacle. This has brought some recent high-profile criticism from Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola, the latter of which noted that in his opinion, the film series no longer resembles cinema: "Honestly, the closest I can think of them, as well made as they are, with actors doing the best they can under the circumstances, is theme parks. It isn't the cinema of human beings trying to convey emotional, psychological experiences to another human being," (Shoard, 2019). Coppola goes one stage further commenting that, "When Martin Scorsese says that the Marvel pictures are not cinema, he's right because we expect to learn something from cinema, we expect to gain something, some enlightenment, some knowledge, some inspiration," (Shoard, 2019a).

These comments both give weight to the idea that spectacle can be used as compensation, and the central film-as-argument thesis. They also echo McKee's comments, made some twenty years earlier, referencing film spectacle in general:

> Spectacles of this kind replace imagination with simulated actuality. They use story as an excuse for heretofore unseen effects that carry us into a tornado, the jaws of a dinosaur, or futuristic holocausts. And make no mistake, these razzle-dazzle spectacles can deliver a circus of excitement. But like amusement park rides, their pleasures are short-lived.
>
> (Mckee, 1998, p. 24)

In this way these films function as big-budget exploitation films, albeit with A and B-list casts. Another example of this kind of cinema is the *Transformer* series (2007-), which pushes the idea of 'theme park' cinema even further – into what has been termed 'chaos cinema'.

Chaos cinema was a term coined by Matthias Stork (2011) that built on David Bordwell's notion of intensified continuity (2002), briefly discussed in the previous chapter. Intensified continuity is the intensification of film coverage and editing: over time edits have become shorter (less time held in a particular shot) and shots have become more 'extreme' (either tighter framing or more pronounced angles). Stork notes that:

> Chaos cinema apes the illiteracy of the modern movie trailer. It consists of a barrage of high-voltage scenes. Every single frame runs on adrenaline. Every shot feels like the hysterical climax of a scene which an earlier movie might have spent several minutes building toward. Chaos cinema is a never-ending crescendo of flair and spectacle. It's a shotgun aesthetic, firing a wide swath of sensationalistic technique that tears the old classical filmmaking style to bits. Directors who work in this mode aren't interested in spatial clarity. It doesn't matter where you are, and it barely matters if you know what's happening onscreen. The new action films are fast, florid, volatile audiovisual war zones.
>
> (Stork, 2011)

Stork makes the point that the only way the viewer can ascertain what might be going on on-screen is by paying attention to the sound of the sequence. In this way, the spectacle becomes essentially as abstract spectacle, removed from any bounds of narrative storytelling be it across the complete running time of the film or the second-by-second of a sequence.

Examples of spectacle that is at the *service* of the storytelling can be found in the classic epics like *Ben Hur* (Wyler, 1959) and *Cleopatra* (Mankiewicz, 1963). Not only is spectacle a genre convention of the epic genre, but scale and awe is needed to communicate the power and reach of the respective Emperors and Empresses. The more recent *Inception* (Nolan, 2010) uses its signature 'spectacle' scene (the literal folding up of a city street) to underlie the malleable nature of even the seemingly most permanent fixtures in a dream; it would not have worked anywhere near so well if all the character could manipulate was a wasp.

8. Sensation

In this context, sensation-as-compensation is the use of extreme sensation to distract from film-as-argument flaws. These extreme sensations tend to be used more commonly in horror, action and erotic/explicit thrillers and dramas, but are not limited to only these genres. These primal sensations can be provoked in the direct visceral sense with use of shots/images that are intrinsically physically confronting (such as in the iconic 'body-shock' work of John Carpenter in *The Thing* (1982) or Clive Barker in *Hellraiser* (1987) which trigger, or attempt to trigger, guttural feelings of disgust and fear, or in a more contextual sense by a cruelty visited upon an innocent, such as the execution of children in Lars von Trier's *The House That Jack Built* (2018), which inspired walk-outs at Cannes (Setoodeh, 2018). In this way the

ultimate sensation-scene would be an intrinsically repulsive creature engaging in horrendous violence on an innocent who has just been having explicit sex. If this type of scene sounds familiar, it is because it is the staple not of mainstream films, but of exploitation films. As the study examined in Chapter 4, exploitation films clearly prioritize sensationalist and extreme renditions of sex, violence and often sexual violence over all other artistic considerations and the aforementioned *Big Bird Cage* (Hill, 1972), an exemplar of the genre, is set in a woman's prison and relies almost wholly on scenes with innocents baring flesh whilst engaging in violent and sexually charged acts.

Again, the test for compensation is emphasis: there is no issue with extreme sensation forming part of the genre expectations of the film (notwithstanding exploitation and pornography that are outside the scope of this thesis), but whether or not they are used the enhance the storytelling as opposed to distracting from the storytelling or to replace the storytelling in a particular sequence. The *Saw* films (2004-) present a useful case study. They helped a new genre of mainstream horror called 'gorenography' or sometimes 'torture porn' (Kerner, 2015, p. 39). This genre usually refers to films where an individual or group are tied up and tortured in graphic ways by the main antagonist/protagonist. Both terms imply that the genre should exist in the exploitation world, but there is no doubting that the *Saw* franchise exists very much in the mainstream (so much so, there is a *Saw*-themed rollercoaster at the Thorpe Park theme park in the UK). These films exist in the mainstream as the horror is always present but it is always at the service of the story: if the graphic nature of the violence was removed (either the violence happened to the characters but was off-screen for the audience) or the violence intrinsically less graphic (someone injected with poison as opposed to having their fingers cut off) then the story would still function. Here, the sensation augments the drama. The alternative is extreme violence or imagery that becomes an end in itself, in the 'freak show' can't-look-away sense, that may be a great talking point or meme (and thus may mean financial success), but is not at the service of the overall storytelling of the film. In this way, the film functions more as a needy look-at-me child, pushing outrageous limits to get attention. A modern example of this is a film series such as *The Human Centipede* (2009-), the whole series of which is fully described by the title. The film chimes in with David Mamet claims about modern cinema, "Films have degenerated to their original operation as carnival amusement – they offer not drama but thrills," (Cousineau, 2012, p. 59).

9. Wish Fulfilment

As the study also examined in Chapter 4, although it is not an internal good in itself, filmic storytelling is particularly effective in creating and fulfilling desires. Whether the wish is formed by the film itself or the desire is pre-existing in the audience member, the story universe the film displays offers a fantasy where dreams can be seen and felt in a quite visceral sense to come true. What the desire is, is not important – for instance Mulvey argues these are typically 'perverse' (Cox & Levine, 2012, p. 37) – only that it is satisfied. These desires can be narrative-led (the hero gets what they want/or is punished), character-led (the audience member wants to 'be' Batman), universe-led (the audience member wants to exist at part of the *Star Trek* world) or sensation-led (the audience member wants the voyeuristic/scopophilic pleasure of the image). A modern version of narrative wish-fulfilment is demonstrated by the film *Knocked Up* (Apatow, 2007), credited as launching not only writer/producer Judd Apatow's career (although he had already enjoyed significant success) but a whole new mode of American comedy. This modern take is notable in narrative in that, untypically, the hero does nothing deserving to 'get the girl', yet 'gets' her anyway in a plot contrivance (or more accurately, plot-ellipsis) that functions as pure wish fulfilment and fit neatly into the millennial zeitgeist (Queenan, 2007).

An example of wish-fulfilment as compensation would be a film such as *Futureworld* (Richard T. Heffron, 1976), the sequel to writer/director Michael Crichton's original film version of *Westworld* (1973). Both stories deal with the wish-fulfilment 'what if' premise of a theme park of robots indistinguishable from humans (where you can live out your wildest fantasies) but whereas *Westworld* dealt with the issues surrounding the use of computers to make computers so that humans have little understanding of the technology, the *Futureworld* story did not necessitate the need for robots (the plot, concerning the replacement of politicians with robots would have worked equally well with plastic-surgery altered humans). The former used the wish-fulfilment as a fundamental thematic story element, the latter as a hook to carry a by-the-numbers thriller.

10. Music

For the purposes of the study, *Music* refers to all uses of music – be it non-diegetic or diegetic, individual tracks or music score. Film blends together many other pre-existing arts, and music is a particularly potent tool primarily as it comprises purely emotional information (Zbikowski, 2010, p. 37). Although there is much overlap in how music is used in each specific film, whilst diegetic music tracks help locate a narrative in time, place, culture, and

the give overall film a specific tone and texture, non-diegetic score primarily functions to indicate to the audience how to read a scene (dramatic as opposed to comedic, for instance). It is worthy of note that the canonical literature on directing focuses almost predominately on visuals, as if the art were still silent films and the interrelation of sound, music and picture was not a core skill of the director. This may be, as composer Ennio Morricone comments, "While good music cannot save a bad film, even bad music cannot ruin a good film," (Alberge, 2015).

So how is music used as a compensation? And how does this function when it comes the genre of musicals?

The musical is a useful case study, as the genre expectations are not just clear but stated explicitly. To risk a tautology: a musical without music is not a musical. One further key genre expectation is that the cast actually sing songs within the diegesis. However, as with the use of cast, it is not a case of removing the music but the emphasis, to see what remains. To take the one of the most financially successful live-action musicals of all time, *Mama Mia* (Lloyd, 2008) it is sometimes referred to as a 'jukebox musical' (Larson, 2014) in that the songs sung in the film consist exclusively from pre-existing chart-friendly tracks, in this case the back-catalogue of Swedish 'supergroup' Abba. More recent examples of this are the film *Yesterday* (Boyle, 2019) which used the back-catalogue of the Beatles, and the biopics *Bohemian Rhapsody* (Singer, 2018) and *Rocketman* (Fletcher, 2019) which used the songs of Queen and Elton John respectively.

The plot of the film itself is remarkably similar to that of *Buona Sera, Mrs. Campbell* (Frank, 1968), where the comedy and drama come from a mother not knowing the father of her grown up daughter. The film comprises an all-star cast, including multiple Oscar winner Meryl Streep, Colin Firth and Piers Brosnan, although none are notable singers. The film also functions as what is referred to as an un-integrated musical, as opposed to an integrated musical. Barry Langford, in his book *Film Genre: Hollywood and Beyond* (2005) defines a non-integrated musical as one "in which numbers simply accumulate serially, and are effectively stand-alone spectacles connected only loosely, if at all, either to each other or to the narrative in which they are embedded," (Langford, 2005, p. 85). An integrated musical is one where the songs (and dances) must advance the plot, so in this way *Mama Mia* is un-integrated, whereas the film *Grease* (Kleiser, 1978) is an equally high-profile example of an integrated musical.

In *Mama Mia*, the songs do not advance the plot – which put the songs firmly in the sphere of compensations. This is not however to say that all un-integrated musicals are by

definition, compensatory. Focusing on whether the songs in *Mama Mia* (as opposed to the score) are functioning as compensations, it is not the songs that have to be removed, but the Abba element. In the same way as stars serve as compensation, whether it is regarded as star-power or franchise-power of the individual songs, does the film need these powers to function? Would the film function just as well with music of equal quality and attractiveness on the ear, but previously unheard from an unknown source? The answer seems to be, no. (Another test could have been purely quantitative – just how many songs were used? The more songs used, the more likely they are being used as a compensation).

An objection to this may be that it was always the intention to construct a film around Abba music, but this only means that the compensation was a deliberate act, not that the film functions in a different way. In fact *Mama Mia* uses both stars and franchise music to compensate for flaws in all other areas. It makes perfect institutional sense to insure against financial failure – if all other elements of the film fail, the audience are still guaranteed to see celebrities singing all the top Abba tracks – which could well compensate completely for a lack of fulfilment in other traditionally key areas of the mainstream narrative feature film experience (fulfilment through story).

In this way, an argument could be made that compensatory non-integrated musicals (and perhaps, in a parallel way, compensatory non-integrated martial-arts films) could be considered a sub-category of exploitation films that are tolerated by the mainstream due to the experiences evoked being less extreme and base than their conventional stable-mates.

In terms of musical score, this is certainly more difficult to use as a compensation overall, although it can certainly (and quite commonly) be used compensate for momentary flaws. Perhaps the most famous example of this is *Jaws* (Spielberg, 1975), where the shark failed to work on set. This resulted in much less than the intended screen time and more use of John Williams' iconic two-note suspenseful score to compensate.

11. Puzzle Solving

In *S/Z: An Essay* (1974), linguist Roland Barthes outlines his five codes of meaning that weave through every narrative: *Proairetic, Semantic, Symbolic, Cultural* and *Hermeneutic* (Barthes, 1974, p. 18), and it is the domination of this last code to which the puzzle-solving compensation relates. The Hermeneutic Code is essentially storytelling through a series of enigmas, both major and minor. This is more substantial than Noel Carroll's erotetic model, which views the micro question-and-answer model as "the most characteristic narrative approach in movies," (Carroll, 1985, p. 97) as the implication is that the film will answer a

major enigma at the close, through the answering of the minor enigmas throughout the narrative. Barthes breaks down the revelation of truth into the following stages: Thematisation (what in the narrative is a mystery?); Positioning (further confirmations of the mystery); Formulation of the mystery; Promise of an answer; Fraud; Equivocation (mixture of fraud and truth); Blocking (the mystery cannot be solved); Suspended answer (interruption of the answer); Partial answer (some truth is revealed); and Disclosure of the truth (Barthes, 1974, p. 30).

In his article, *The Mind Game Film* (2009) Thomas Elsaesser notes a new sub-genre, which he refers to as 'The Mind Game Film', named for a term used by director Lars von Trier in referring to his film *The Boss of It All* (2006) where he placed a series of objects that were out of place (called Lookeys) for the audience to spot; he referred to it as "a basic mind game, played with movies," (Elsaesser, 2009, p. 13). Elsaesser (2009, p. 14) defines the mind game film as comprising

> …movies that are "playing games," and this at two levels: there are films in which a character is being played games with, without knowing it or without knowing who it is that is playing these (often very cruel and even deadly) games with him (or her)… Then, there are films where it is the audience that is played games with, because certain crucial information is withheld or ambiguously presented.

Elsaesser puts Jonathan Demme's *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), David Fincher's *Seven* (1995) and *The Game* (1997) and Peter Weir's *The Truman Show* (1998) into the former category and Bryan Singer's *The Usual Suspects* (1995), Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999) and Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000) into the latter. He notes that sometimes "information may be withheld from both characters and audience", as in M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense* (1999) and that "sometimes, the "masters" of the game reveal themselves… but mostly they do not, and at other times, a puppet master is caught up in his own game, as in Spike Jonze/Charlie Kaufman's *Being John Malkovich* (1999), the hypochondriac writer in the same team's *Adaptation* (2002), or the two magicians in Nolan's *The Prestige* (2006)," (Elsaesser, 2009, p. 14). Elsaesser (2009, p. 14) also notes that some films have the mind-game tendency to

> … put the emphasis on "mind": they feature central characters whose mental condition is extreme, unstable, or pathological; yet instead of being examples of case studies, their ways of seeing, interaction with other characters, and their "being in the world"

> are presented as normal. The films thus once more "play games" with the audience's (and the characters') perception of reality: they oblige one to choose between seemingly equally valid, but ultimately incompatible "realities" or "multiverses".

Here, he cites such films as Ron Howard's *A Beautiful Mind* (2001), David Cronenberg's *Spider* (2002), Richard Kelly's *Donnie Darko* (2001), and the Wachowski's *The Matrix* (1999).

But how does film-as-puzzle work as a compensation? Essentially, it relates to the joy of the solving of the puzzle. If the mystery is intriguing enough, if the solution is original, bold or ingenious enough, it could compensate for flaws in other areas. In addition to Elsaesser's mind game films, heist films such as *Ocean's 11* (Soderbergh, 2001) could also qualify as films able to use puzzle as compensation.

Puzzle-as-compensation functions in two ways. First is the joy for the audience in solving (or watching being solved) not just the big puzzle, but all the smaller puzzles leading up to the big reveal. The second is the quality of the final revelation and in this way, puzzle-as-compensation functions much in the same way as spectacle; if the impact is strong enough, if it is 'water-cooler' worthy, it compensates. (This could also be thought of as 'plot twist' as compensation).

A particularly good example is the aforementioned M. Night Shyamalan's, *The Sixth Sense* (1999). The story of a psychiatrist attempting to help a child who can 'see dead people', it hides information from both main character and audience, and the final revelation that the psychiatrist is a dead person has made it one of the more memorable plot-twist reveals in recent cinema. However, once the reveal has been made, the film does not pass scrutiny from even the most cursory of reflections: only the moments that work for communicating the mystery are shown. The rules of the story give the psychiatrist issues with other people seeing him, yet he exists in the public sphere – did he not wonder why no-one else could see him? Yet the joy and fun of the puzzle, and especially the twist, circumvents the need for story-world logic. But is it a compensation? To apply the subtraction test, if you take away the presentation of the puzzle (either by making the audience aware of the protagonist's post-mortem character from the start, or by removing the twist), does it weaken the argument? If the argument is about the need to face your fears, then it is certainly augmented by the impactful reveal that the main character personifies this more than anyone else; that all his decisions have not been simply to help another, but to avoid what he most dreads. Using this

rationale, the twist may not have been perfectly executed, but it is not acting as a compensation.

12. Promise of the Premise/The Obligatory Scene(s)

In his book *Save the Cat: The Last Book on Screenwriting You'll Ever Need* (2005), screenwriter Blake Snyder discusses the idea of the 'promise of the premise' and the related theory of the 'obligatory scene'. In a high concept romantic-comedy such as *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* (Petrie, 2003), the premise is that, for a story, a female reporter starts dating a 'guy' (who doesn't know she's a reporter) and make every deliberate dating mistake she can in order to make sure he dumps her within ten days. Unbeknownst to her the 'guy' has a separate bet running with his boss that he can make any woman fall in love with him – in ten days. The promise of the premise comprises sequences that take full advantage of the guy-tolerating-outrageous-dump-worthy actions from the reporter. These are a logical extrapolation of the premise and if were not present, would represent a major disappointment in the eyes of the perceived audience. The obligatory scene(s) are a scene or scenes that are not just scenes that fulfil the promise of the premise but major plot points: the falling in love (for real) scene; the scene-where-he-finds-out-she-is-a-reporter; and the ending-up-with-each-other-scene.

When do these function as compensations? Again, it is a question of emphasis. The premise of a film is a plot 'hook', not a thematic idea or a fully developed argument. In a film series such as *The Fast and the Furious* (2001-), the promise of the premise is to have super-fast, super-glamorous car chases with outrageously expensive and customized vehicles. The concept would function as a compensation if the film was almost exclusively comprised of these sequences with very little narrative surrounding them and the chases themselves not driving the story (much like an un-integrated musical). The obligatory scene would be the final and biggest chase sequence of the film and could qualify as a compensation for the same reasons: it is un-integrated and the glamour exceeds the needs of the narrative or the genre. It is interesting to note that the series started with only cars and wheel-based vehicles, but now every form of vehicle is involved in the chases (cars, planes, boats, trains, helicopters) and the marginal sense of realism of the original films has been abandoned with the later sequels.

The *Rocky* franchise (1976-) furnishes a particularly striking example of this kind of compensation. The promise of the premise is the fight at the end of the film, and the obligatory scene the training montage. In the first two films, the training montages were joyous and very much at the service of the story, yet by the time of *Rocky IV* (Stallone, 1985)

the montages (albeit not all training montages) had a combined running time of 29 minutes and 10 seconds, comprising just under 32% of the entire running time of the film (against a total running time of 91 minutes and 31 seconds, including credits).

13. Recognition of Self

As noted by Sinnerbrink (2018, p. 198), audiences derive meaning from engaging with fictional characters and their perspectives, be it through emotional engagement or estrangement. Audiences can experienced enhanced engagement if they recognise themselves in one of a film's characters, or recognise in them an image of themselves they wish for and identify with. For Recognition of Self to function as a compensation there must be significant alignment between audience member and character, but what element precisely creates this alignment is almost impossible to predict. This makes the compensation less likely to be an encoded insurance at the time of creation. The element that impacts and connects the viewer to the character does not require much screen time. It could any or all of the following: a jacket the character wears, a gesture they make, their voice, turn-of-phrase/vocabulary, attitude, hair, overall look, sense-of-humour, personality, sense of interaction, character flaw, fashion sense, life or work circumstances. Yet once impact has been made and maintained, then the compensation can be absolute.

These characters need not be archetypal heroes, nor aspirational. Anti-heroes can have impact, as can secondary characters. As the recognition is so personal to each audience member, objective examples are problematic, but characters that certainly captured the zeitgeist are those such as Patrick Bateman (Christian Bale) from *American Psycho* (Harron, 2000), Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey) from *American Beauty* (Mendes, 1999), Ben Stone (Seth Rogen) from *Knocked Up* (Apatow, 2007), Juno (Ellen Page) from *Juno* (Reitman, 2007), Elizabeth Bennett (Keira Knightley) from *Pride and Prejudice* (Wright, 2005) and Hermione Granger (Emma Watson) from the *Harry Potter* series (2001-2011).

Recognition of self and the consequent connection between audience and character is highly dependent, not just on the writing or staging of the film, but on the energy and charisma (or lack of it) of the actor. This connection will always function as a compensation, as the film clearly does not require this strength of feeling from the audience in order to function – yet if it is present most flaws of a film can be overlooked or forgiven.

14. Dialogue

Dialogue serves many functions in a film narrative. Gives the audience a sense of time, place, character, provides a sense of realism, provides nuance to the theme, carries plot information and exposition. Some practitioners attempt to stay away from dialogue (among them, writer and director Sergio Leone, known for his 'Spaghetti Westerns'), creatively leaning almost completely on image and music. Others push dialogue into a realm where it becomes a key joy of the film experience itself (such as David Mamet, Aaron Sorkin, Quentin Tarantino, William Goldman, Paddy Chayefsky, Diablo Cody, Nora Ephron, Cameron Crowe and James L. Brooks). Their dialogue is expansive and dominates the picture to the extent that minimal camera movement is used so as not to distract from what the characters are saying. David Fincher, a director known for elegant use of camera movement, kept the camera work particularly basic and static for *The Social Network* (Fincher, 2010) to allow Sorkin's dialogue to take centre-stage.

In terms of personal style, Tarantino has taken this one stage further and has deliberately cultivated a trademark not just for the way in which his characters speak, but what they speak about (usually new interpretations of pop-culture references). The dialogue is usually so distinctive that viewers can often tell what re-write work he has done – most notably *Crimson Tide* (Scott, 1995) – be it credited or uncredited (Hanson, 2002, p. 35).

15. Strong Sequences

Although the concept of Strong Sequences is usually a manifestation of the Promise of the Premise, such as the sinking of the Titanic in *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997), or the Obligatory Scene (the end courtroom confrontation in *A Few Good Men* (Reiner, 1992)), it is not necessary for it to be a sequence telegraphed by the set-up of the film overall. A Strong Sequence is an extended sequence that is of a quality that justifies, both literally and metaphorically, the 'admission price alone', providing enough satisfaction to sustain flaws in other areas.

Many of the contemporary Hollywood masters seem masters more of the sequence than the film. The aforementioned *Titanic* is a run-of-the-mill Romeo and Juliet romance with little thematic intent or nuanced argument, but the hour-long sequence of the ship sinking is (by most accounts) breathtaking. A film that comprises three or four of these sequences within its running time is likely to be forgiven for significant flaws.

16. 'Based on A True Story'

In his article, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From 'Gone with the Wind' to 'The Passion of the Christ'* (2007), Thomas Leitch notes that film predicated with a 'Based on a True Story' logline are, "authorless, publisherless, agentless. Because the description may be claimed or not at the filmmakers' pleasure, it appears only when it is to the film's advantage… Although they pretend to be transcendental, the truth claims of the tag "based on a true story" are always strategic and instrumental," (Leitch, 2007, p. 282).

For Leitch, the strategic benefits are not initially issues of fact or truth, but of authority:

> In the same way, the claim to be based on a true story appeals to the master text of the true story—a secularized, authorless Book of Life not to be confused with reality or history or the truth—for specific kinds of textual authority, all of them having only an incidental relation to historical accuracy… By declining to label or localize their intertexts, or by obscuring their specific intertexts behind the more slippery claim to be based on a true story, these films mask their internally persuasive discourse, to use Bakhtin's distinction, as authoritative discourse.
>
> (Leitch, 2007, p. 287)

Leitch acknowledges mainstream narrative feature film's ability/intention to function as internally persuasive discourses and sees the 'Based on a True Story' tag as a specific and targeted way to augment the argument by attempting to take any judgement away from the audience, to present the discourse as fact, not argument in way that mimics Bakhtin's (1981) authoritative discourse. Leitch further acknowledges that the tag functions as "a support for stories that might well have trouble standing on their own…" (Leitch, 2007, p. 286).

Therefore, the use of the rider 'Based on a True Story' as a compensation is quite straightforward yet particularly powerful: by a simple appeal to real life, the claim is that '*this really happened'.* Leitch actually breaks these claims down further into the eight categories, "Don't blame us; Isn't this sad/inspiring/heroic; Stranger than fiction; Now it can be told; Behind the headlines; Explaining the inexplicable; Not just another movie; You need to know this," (Leitch, 2007, p. 288). The rider can serve to make up for almost all flaws: character inconsistencies, plotting inconsistencies, or lack of argumentative logic. For instance, would *The Wolf of Wall Street* (Scorsese, 2013), a completely derivative story of an amoral stock

trader, really have been taken as seriously by both critics and audiences if it had merely been classed as pure fiction?

This compensation also directly relates back to *ethos*, one of Aristotle's three tenets of persuasion, the 'coming from a credible source'. What better source is there than objective truth?

17. Novelty

In marketing the Unique Selling Point (U.S.P.) dominates. What does your product have that no others have? Are you the first to market? In business, the 'first mover advantage' (F.M.A.) applies to individuals or companies moving into a new market – the first to move can establish market dominance and brand recognition in their field (Kerin, Varadarajan and Peterson, 1992). Whilst films, being a single product (as opposed to a single type of product, such as velcro) cannot dominate a market in the same way, this 'first to market' is nonetheless a demonstration of uniqueness.

This can apply to the film as a whole, or a single element. *Thank You For Smoking* (Reitman, 2005) was the first commercially prominent film to show the big tobacco lobbyist world from the inside (with a lobbyist as the hero); most of the film's running time and inventiveness is spent establishing this new world to the audience. There is very little drama present, and if there had been another film set within the same world, perhaps it would not have fared so well financially (making back over six times its budget in cinemas) or critically (an 86% score on Rottentomatoes.com). Consider, by contrast, a minimally dramatic film set amongst the familiar world of a jury, for instance. *From Dusk Till Dawn* (Rodriguez, 1996) was the first mainstream film to emphatically and self-consciously switch genres halfway through its running time (crime thriller to horror-comedy); an oddity, but also an attempt to establish a new filmic storytelling method. *Bullitt* (Yates, 1968) was the first mainstream film to show an extended car chase, at 10 minutes and 53 seconds, and the first to use the San Francisco streets as a location for the chase (which has been so oft-repeated now, it has become a trope of its own – see *The Rock* (Bay, 1996) and *The Dead Pool* (Van Horn, 1988) for examples). This clearly paved the way for film franchises such as *The Fast and the Furious* (2001-), which, since it does not have the novelty factor, has to continually raise the stakes and production value of the chases to become 'must see' sequences.

As the concept of novelty is a contextual rather than textual element, it follows that a film manifesting it will always survive if it is removed, however this is not always the case. Again emphasis is key, and in this context a level of extremity or boldness is necessary to

indicate the possibility of compensation: a character wearing black shoes for the first time on screen will hardly function as a compensatory element, but the first film to feature 3D, IMAX or (as in the case of 1950's American cinema) 'smello-vision', may find that this element compensates for significant flaws.

18. Homage

Homage is an allusion or imitation by one artist to another, or respect or reverence paid or rendered (Macmillan Dictionary). In film terms, it is usually represented by the inclusion of props, dialogue or even mimesis of shot construction. This intertextual 'doffing of the cap' to a previous master or masterful film can be either self-indulgently obscure or used to create a shared sense of collusion with the audience (see *Fan Service*, below).

At the extreme end of homage is pastiche and parody. Pastiche is the making of an *entire* film in the mode of an older film or genre, such as *Far From Heaven* (Haynes, 2002), a romantic drama set in the 1950's and constructed as if made in the 1950's, probably by Douglas Sirk. Its director, Todd Haynes, returned to pastiche with *Carol* (2015). By contrast, parody is the lampooning of the tropes (either affectionate or otherwise) of genres for comic effect, perfected in modern cinema by Mel Brooks (see the 'western' *Blazing Saddles* (1974), 'classic Universal horror' *Young Frankenstein* (1974), 'Hitchcockian thriller' *High Anxiety* (1977) and 'science-fiction adventure' *Spaceballs* (1987) for examples). A film such as *Ready Player One* (Spielberg, 2018) sits between the two extremes, being neither a pastiche nor parody, but nostalgically constructed almost entirely of references to other films, computer games and pop-culture ephemera.

The test of compensation cannot simply be to remove the reference as this will fall almost immediately foul of the appeal to genre conventions: you cannot remove what makes a film a pastiche or parody and have it remain within genre. A better test is to think of pastiche and parody as multi-genre ('sci-fi-comedy parody', 'horror-pastiche') and then to remove the knowledge of the signified: does *Far From Heaven* succeed in its argument if the audience is not aware of the pastiche? That is to say, does the film's argument work either through the technique of pastiche or in its absence? If neither, the pastiche element is being used as a compensation. In this way, as *Far From Heaven* uses pastiche to examine how the past can betray by bringing a contemporary issue (in this case, homosexuality) into a copy of a Sirk-style film, pastiche is not being used as a compensation.

In the case of *Spaceballs*, it becomes a question of whether the science-fiction-comedy is funny once awareness of the *Star Wars* (1977-) or *Star Trek* (1966-) franchises is removed.

If yes, it means the film is not using parody as a compensation (for instance, the gag where the President 'beams' to another place, only to moments later be revealed as the room next door works purely within the science-fiction rules of *Spaceballs* itself. The 'beaming' *Star Trek* reference is a further level of potential enjoyment). Contrast this with the later, less critically and financially successful parodic works by Mel Brooks (*Robin Hood: Men in Tights*, 1993 or *Dracula: Dead and Loving It*, 1995).

Ready Player One (2018), presents an interesting conundrum. Most likely by design, the film does function without the use of the references (made more general than the exclusively 1980's references used in the book on which the film is based), but the emphasis is extreme, the references present in most scenes of the film. The scale of those references provide compensation for what is a relatively straightforward action-adventure, a genre that does not require homage.

19. Fan Service

In his article, *Superhero Fan Service: Audience Strategies in the Contemporary Interlinked Hollywood blockbuster (2016*), Bart Beaty defines 'fan service' as *"*a series of narrative "rewards"" that are established in the film (Beaty, 2016, p. 324).

Fan service has its origins in the Japanese world of anime and manga fandom. This concept of 'servicing' the fans of a particular franchise to "cater unabashedly to an audience's expressed desires," (Beaty, 2016, p. 324), originally had very specific manifestations, namely gratuitous titillation. In *The Glimpse and Fan Service: New Media, New Aesthetics* (2008), Keith Russell denotes them as "the random and gratuitous display of a series of anticipated gestures… These gestures include such things as panty shots, leg spreads (spread legs) and glimpses of breasts" (Russell, 2008, p. 105). Other manifestations included "highly detailed images of robots and other forms of technology, or strongly eroticized and sexualized elements," and "the muscled bodies of the series stars," (Beaty, 2016, p. 324). Russell applies a new form of seeing to fan service, the 'Glimpse'. "In the case of Manga and Anime, we can gaze and look and glance and also, importantly, we can glimpse". He regards the glimpse as a form of freedom: "Characters and viewers celebrate the freedom of the glimpse, while both also experience the function of the gaze". He contrasts the glimpse to the Mulvey-an male gaze, stating that in the case of the gaze "the object of desire is located within a dramatic tension that implicates the viewer in the appropriation of the viewed. In the case of the glimpse, no such appropriation is implied," (Russell, 2008, p. 108). Essentially, this is a matter of looking without guilt.

However, the entry of fan service into mainstream cinema has broadened the definition, now referring to inter-textual references or any other elements that the perceived audience (or real audience, if the fan service is directly relating to fan comments) desires. In this way, fan service can be thought of as closely related to the compensation of Wish Fulfilment – albeit on a micro-scale. Although the list is not exhaustive, in his discussion of the Marvel Cinematic Universe Beaty delineates fan service into five distinct categories: *Post-credit scenes, Easter eggs, Crossovers, Linked Repercussions*, and *Modular Story Development* (Beaty, 2016, p. 322). Each of these categories are designed to reward the audience, and he notes that:

> …[A]n expanded notion of fan service is a useful way to denote textual elements that reward high levels of engagement with the franchise and with its source materials. The frisson of excitement that is generated in a knowledgeable fan when she spots Cosmo the Spacedog in Guardians of the Galaxy, for example, is a reward reserved for hardcore fans who can be flatteringly positioned as connoisseurs or opinion leaders within organic fan communities.
>
> (Beaty, 2016, p. 324)

This hierarchy of knowledge is key to fan service as "the elements that serve this promotional function variously address hardcore and casual audiences in different ways, establishing a hierarchy of knowledge, connection, and intimacy within the consumer base to bring about the conversion of casual viewers into deeply committed hardcores," (Beaty, 2016, p. 322).

Fan service is very much the domain of film franchises, as there must be initial fans to service. Any film from the M.C.U. would serve as a strong case study, but *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (JJ Abrams, 2015) is perhaps the most illustrative of how fan service can be used as a compensation. The first Disney production within one of the most successful film franchises in history, and the first not to be overseen by series creator George Lucas, the pressure on the film to succeed financially was immense. In fact, as is fitting for the penultimate case study in this chapter, the film contains a combination of most of the compensations already outlined. The story, taking place thirty years after the original *Star Wars* trilogy (1977-1983), concerns the next (younger) generation of heroes fighting against a resurgence of the old, ruthlessly totalitarian Empire. Those compensations the film uses are:

Franchise – one of the most financially successful film franchises in history
Genre Conventions – the film does not attempt to extend the genre and moves from one conventional scene to the next, essentially a collection of space and Jedi battles with a Jedi apprentice character at the centre of the narrative.
Cast – The film contains actors that are uniformly attractive, and its use of stars is both obvious (Harrison Ford reprising the role that made him a star) and hidden (Daniel Craig as a Stormtrooper (uncredited), Simon Pegg as an unrecognizable Alien). These also function as Easter Eggs (see *Fan Service*).
Author – JJ Abrams provides great security to the audience, as he was hired due to his successful track record of rebooting Science-Fiction franchises (*Star Trek*).
Visual Pleasure – All categories are utilised, from beauty of cast, machinery and design (from the architecture to the handles of the light-sabres).
Spectacle – the space battles provide regular visual and audio pleasure on a significant scale.
Wish Fulfilment – The universe of the story provides significant wish fulfilment, a seductive place that is full of high technology, adventure and intrigue, and the figure of the Jedi – a combination of Samurai and Magician is essentially an aspirational superhero within the story space.
Promise of Premise – The promise is of space battles and Jedi Knights, and the film constantly delivers these sequences.
Obligatory Scene – There are many set up by the narrative, but perhaps the most impactful is the reuniting of Han Solo with his ship, the Millennium Falcon. The other obligatory scene, designed to be the most emotional, is the meeting of Solo with his son, the villain Kylo Ren. The film builds towards this, and when the son kills the father, it is a huge 'must-see' moment in the canon of the stories.
Recognition of Self – There is a clear attempt to connect with a new demographic by making the divisive decision to cast a person of colour (in this case John Boyega, a British actor of Nigerian descent) as the main protagonist (Lee, 2015).
Strong Sequences – As the film has the pressure of setting up a whole new series of films, there can be little closure and the narrative functions as a series of strong sequences that do not have to pay-off any narrative set-ups.
Homage – As the discourses around the film confirm (Collins, 2016), the film is essentially an homage to the original *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977). Even the visual look of the film – from the choice of digital format and grading to the mise-en-scene – puts the film in the realm of both pastiche and remix.

Fan Service – Much of the above functions as fan service, and from the broadest perspective, a sequel itself can be considered a form of fan service. There were many discourses around the film both berating and praising the film for the amount of fan service included (Perez, 2015), from the use of a new 'cute droid' BB8 (taking the mantle from R2D2) to a new heroine for the female demographic, to bringing back legacy cast members and props (Han Solo and the Millennium Falcon) to the various 'Easter Eggs' (hidden celebrity cameos from cast popular with science fiction fans).

It is also illustrative to note the compensations *The Force Awakens* did *not* use. This is not the say these elements were not present but that the emphasis was not extreme enough to have an impact on the film experience overall. These are the *Happy Ending* (the ending is hopeful but consistent with the narrative that has preceded it), *Sensation* (extreme sensations in the audience are not pursued, apart from the death of Han Solo), *Music* (written by original composer John Williams, this functions more as fan service as the music is not dominating the pictures), *Puzzle Solving* (there is mystery to finding Luke Skywalker, but this comprises only one of many narrative strands), *Dialogue* (functional), *True Story* (clearly a fiction) and *Novelty* (the film highlights it is a continuation, not a pioneer).

20. Obscurity/Chaos/Confusion

The final compensation is the least used and it has the highest chance of failure, but still worthy of note. It is essentially compensation-by-confusion, the logic being that it is better to be obscure than showcase obvious flaws. This is obviously highly problematic as a compensation usually represents a joy for the audience to distract from a flaw, so the covering a flaw with a larger flaw seems destined for failure. However, it could be argued that a section of the audience, however small, can delight in the obscure and the impenetrable. In this way, this compensation could function as a subset of the Puzzle Solving compensation, but in reverse; not joy generating by the setting up and solving of a puzzle, but the joy from attempting to unravel a puzzle that can never be fully solved. Examples of this could be films such as the divisive *Inland Empire* (Lynch, 2006) or even *8½* (Fellini, 1963), although it is not limited to art-house or surrealist films – Michael Bay's *Transformers: Dark Side of the Moon* (2011) could easily be regarded as using confusion as compensation, both narratively and through the use of chaos cinema during the spectacle sequences that comprise most of the running time of the film. The usual test of subtraction still stands: would the film's argument be weakened or undermined if the aspect of the film in question were removed or substituted

with a non-compensatory equivalent? In the case of films where the idea of obscurity is central to the argument, the answer would be yes; therefore the obscurity is not a compensation.

6.3 Conclusion

To begin with a caveat: as much as the attempt has been made, any list of compensations can never be truly exhaustive. There are myriad reasons why a film is considered a rewarding experience, many particularly subjective and personal.

However, the priority of this chapter was to outline how this thesis defines 'failure' and how it manifests: how the Cinema of Compensation conceptualizes the creative methods that allow the majority of mainstream narrative feature films to achieve external, rather than internal success by the definitions of the social practice (to 'fail' yet still support the thesis). It has demonstrated how these methodologies allow for the internal success of the practice (to make a worthwhile argument in a worthwhile way) to be incognizant amongst practitioners and institutions.

In a way, the compensations (for flawed argument) could also be considered as 'confusions'. As has been investigated in previous chapters, there is no significant discussion of film as a social practice in the canonical instructional literature, which allows for practitioners to hold a variety of different and conflicting conceptions, from the highly developed to the completely instinctive. This makes it highly possible for practitioners to confuse, for instance, the compensations of *sensation* or *spectacle* or *fan service* for the internal good of the practice. In the case of the latter, it is a common claim for practitioners and institutions to claim that they want to give the audience what they want. Responding to criticism of *Suicide Squad* (Ayer, 2016), screenwriter and director David Ayer defended himself by claiming he, "[m]ade it for the fans," (Robinson, 2017). In some cases, practitioners become known for some facet of their writing or directing (compensation rather than the internal good) and they begin to focus, even pursue that element (such as M. Night Shyamalan and twist endings) which would fall broadly under the *Puzzle Solving* compensation. In this case, unless the conception of the social practice is cognizant, it is likely for the practitioner to focus on the compensation rather than the internal good and the overall practice suffers.

The defence of the thesis in previous chapters has thus far focused on the critical application of new and existing theoretical frameworks to mainstream narrative feature film,

and hermeneutic analysis of dominant industry thought. It has made a significant case for mainstream narrative feature film to be considered a social practice in the teleological sense, governed by the associated notion of internal goods, and that the most plausible articulation of these is the singular good to 'move the audience to a worthwhile conclusion in a worthwhile way'. The case for this articulation to be considered primary has been argued with reference to other competing notions, which have been demonstrated to be significantly flawed despite their ubiquity. An examination of the industry orthodoxy has revealed the practice of mainstream narrative feature film is not conceptualised in the manner the thesis defends, with the result the practice currently incognizant and particularly vulnerable to failure. An account of how most mainstream narrative feature films can fail the internal good of the practice yet the industry survives has been formulated as an appeal to 'compensations', as outlined in this chapter. The final stage of the defence of this thesis comes in the form of detailed case studies in the following two chapters; an exemplar and a problematic counter-example. Although the scope of the study is the social practice of mainstream narrative feature film from conception to delivery, and as such does not necessarily require an analysis of completed works, the case for the thesis is considerably strengthened by recourse to specific examples.

Chapter Seven

The Exemplar: *Toy Story 3*

7.1 The Example – Why Pixar's *Toy Story 3*?

> Crucial to Mulhall's Cavellian-inspired film-philosophy is that such claims are not to be defended by general arguments over the 'film as philosophy' thesis, but by detailed analyses and critical interpretations of the film themselves. For Mulhall, as for Cavell, this is the only way to debate, argue, or defend the claims made for their philosophical significance.
>
> (Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 122)

As the study noted in Chapter 2, following Sinnerbrink, a thesis such as the one defended in this dissertation is best defended not simply by general abstract claims, but by appeal to specific examples of completed works, interrogated in detail.

However, before embarking on the analysis, the study needs to address Barthes' still influential contention outlined in *Death of the Author* that states that, "a text consists of multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other, into parody, contestation…" (Barthes, 1967). This is necessary as although theories of spectatorship and reception are beyond the scope of this study, the following two chapters will nonetheless rely on justifying precise interpretations of the works as definitive. How will it do this? Notwithstanding any theoretical objections to Barthes (notably Wolff 1981 and Burke 2008), all interpretations of the works contained in this study are not offered as speculation on what any physical viewer may comprehend, but rather (using the film in conjunction with the orthodoxy of the social practice) as informed judgments on what the practitioner or practitioners were intending to communicate. It is a similar approach to that taken by Macdonald (2013) in his analysis of screenwriting poetics:

> Even if an element is likely to be true, such as a loud and sudden noise creating a startling effect in the viewer, it is not perhaps the noise that is significant, but the fact

> that the screenwriter chooses this moment in the narrative as the appropriate moment to startle you, and to use a specific means to do so.
>
> (Macdonald, 2013, p. 2)

Kristin Thompson (2003, pp. 36-73) also makes a similar point believing that the most significant research questions in the study of screenwriting are concerned with what filmmakers thought they were doing, what they thought would be effective rather than any ultimate effect.

In this way, the 'viewer' is an entity that exists only in the mind of the practitioner, a theoretical construct that the practitioner uses all their talents and training to move to a worthwhile conclusion in a worthwhile way. This subjective conceptualisation could be highly flawed, if not objectively wrong, but this is not relevant as it is the theoretical construct that guides the creative process of the practitioner. The readings of the films offered here use the film and the orthodoxy to 'reverse-engineer' the intended argument offered by the practitioner.

As the film-as-worthwhile-argument thesis should be defendable using any mainstream narrative feature film, then why *Toy Story 3*? Not only is it animation (which the majority of mainstream narrative feature films are not), but it is also a *second* sequel. A second sequel is not usually an indication of quality as the motivation for it is usually financial, not creative. *Toy Story 3* has nonetheless been chosen as it is one of the most accessible examples of successful cinematic argument in modern mainstream narrative cinema.

The film is also selected in large part due to the animation studio that made it. Beginning in 1979 as The Graphics Group, part of George Lucas' Lucasfilm, Pixar became a standalone company in 1986 with finance from ex-Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, before being bought by Disney in 2006. As of the close of 2019 it has made 21 feature-length animation films with an average worldwide theatrical (in cinemas) gross of approximately $660 million US Dollars per film and not one has failed at the box office. Even *The Good Dinosaur* (Sohn, 2015) with $332 million – widely viewed as a slight disappointment by both critics and audiences – ultimately topped the sales charts on DVD (Arnold, 2016). This level of success is critical to the choice of case study, as the parameters of the thesis as laid out in Chapter 1 are concerned with the internal good of the social practice as regards practitioners only (defined as screenwriters, directors, and in exceptional cases, creative producers), which in most cases would end at the first delivery of what the practitioner considers the final film to

the distributor. The precise delivery process for each film is often unique to that film, and usually practitioners have to sign an N.D.A. (Non-Disclosure Agreement) as part of their contract, which means unpicking precisely what the director first delivered is difficult, especially as they cannot share this information themselves. Therefore, when it comes to recourse to completed films, an exemplar can only be selected if it is clear that the director (or screenwriter/director) had 'final cut' or complete autonomy over the course of the entire production, which means the public version of the film is the same cut the practitioner first delivered. (It's worth noting that there is actually a simple process to be certain that the opposite is true – that a director has disowned a film – as in extreme circumstances they ask for their name to be removed from the credits, and until the year 2000, DGA rules meant that the pseudonym 'Alan Smithee' would usually be used instead).

Due to both Pixar's and the Toy Story's previous track record of success, and their openness about their workflow, the study can be confident that *Toy Story 3* is the film the practitioners (Story Contributor/Director Lee Unkrich, Screenwriter Michael Arndt and Story Contributors John Lasseter (also studio head) and Andrew Stanton) wanted it to be. It is also worth outlining Pixar's workflow, as they credit their success to an emphasis on story over animation tricks and technologies.

Pixar – Typical Workflow

Pixar has a very dogmatic approach to storytelling. There is no creative priority to enlarge the paradigm of a conventional mainstream narrative feature film, instead the focus is to create perfect syntagms. Pixar holds that conventional cinematic storytelling evolved naturally as it was the form that best served the audience in terms of accessibility and emotional connection, and to work against that paradigm is merely to narrow your audience. As discussed in Chapter 2, they conceive the conventional storytelling/audience relationship as a two-dimensional pyramid: the ultimate conventional storyteller works at the bottom of the triangle, providing access to the largest possible audience – whereas the ultimate avant-garde storyteller works at the top of the pyramid, essentially an artist making work only for other artists or themselves. In this way, Pixar's approach to filmmaking represents the binary opposite to a filmmaker such as Terrence Malick.

This dogmatism is not completely formalized, existing as a series of articles and unofficial (but not disavowed) mission statements. On Twitter, Pixar storyboard artist Emma Coats put together a list of twenty-two (much shared by the mainstream press) Pixar

storytelling rules she observed during her time working for the studio (Cavna, 2012). They are as follows (corrected for syntax and grammar):

1. *You admire a character for trying more than for their successes.*
2. *You have got to keep in mind what's interesting to you as an audience, not what's fun to do as a writer. They can be very different.*
3. *Trying for theme is important, but you won't see what the story is actually about until you're at the end of it. Now rewrite.*
4. *Once upon a time there was ___. Every day, ___. One day ___. Because of that, ___. Because of that, ___. Until finally ___.*
5. *Simplify. Focus. Combine characters. Hop over detours. You'll feel like you're losing valuable stuff but it sets you free.*
6. *What is your character good at, comfortable with? Throw the polar opposite at them. Challenge them. How do they deal?*
7. *Come up with your ending before you figure out your middle. Seriously. Endings are hard, get yours working up front.*
8. *Finish your story, let go even if it's not perfect. In an ideal world you have both, but move on. Do better next time.*
9. *When you're stuck, make a list of what WOULDN'T happen next. Lots of times the material to get you unstuck will show up.*
10. *Pull apart the stories you like. What you like in them is a part of you; you've got to recognize it before you can use it.*
11. *Putting it on paper lets you start fixing it. If it stays in your head, a perfect idea, you'll never share it with anyone.*
12. *Discount the 1st thing that comes to mind. And the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th – get the obvious out of the way. Surprise yourself.*
13. *Give your characters opinions. Passive/malleable might seem likable to you as you write, but it's poison to the audience.*
14. *Why must you tell THIS story? What's the belief burning within you that your story feeds off of? That's the heart of it.*
15. *If you were your character, in this situation, how would you feel? Honesty lends credibility to unbelievable situations.*
16. *What are the stakes? Give us reason to root for the character. What happens if they don't succeed? Stack the odds against.*

17. *No work is ever wasted. If it's not working, let go and move on – it'll come back around to be useful later.*
18. *You have to know yourself: the difference between doing your best & fussing. Story is testing, not refining.*
19. *Coincidences to get characters into trouble are great; coincidences to get them out of it are cheating.*
20. *Exercise: take the building blocks of a movie you dislike. How do you rearrange them into what you DO like?*
21. *You have got to identify with your situation/characters, can't just write 'cool'. What would make YOU act that way?*
22. *What's the essence of your story? Most economical telling of it? If you know that, you can build out from there.*

The above is a good summary of what in the industry are considered standard story development questions. It is worthy of note, in terms of film-as-argument as incognizant practice, that at number (3) Coats reminds the reader that theme is "important", as if it is something that writers often reject. Furthermore, even here it is conceived merely as "important" rather than "integral". The rule about what the writer believes (and therefore wants to communicate) is down at number (14) and is conceptualised in very basic terms.

Yet this adherence to story is, perhaps surprisingly, not typical of either live action or animated films made by other studios. In an interview with Scott Myers of *Go Into the Story* (the official Blog of The Blacklist, the top organisation in Hollywood that champions the 'best' unproduced screenplays of the year), senior development executive at Pixar Mary Coleman (the person responsible for bringing in *Toy Story 3* screenwriter Michael Arndt) outlined their overall story-crafting process (Myers, 2012). First is their view of practitioners:

> Pixar commits to artists... knowing that there are going to be drafts and screenings that fall flat, but instead of panicking and firing people we commit to the long-term development process… In the theatre we workshopped a new play for months. At Pixar it's years, literally 5 years, to get the story right… the technology is always a tool to serve storytelling.
>
> (Myers, 2012, Part 1)

The process starts from the top down:

> John [Lasseter – then Pixar head] chooses someone he feels is ready to direct… they are asked to come up with three original, totally different ideas – different worlds, different characters, different genres… Once an idea is picked, we spend the first year researching that world and digging into the types of characters found there… But the most important work of that first year is finding the core of the story, what it is the director wants to communicate to the world.
>
> (Myers, 2012, Part 2)

It is worthy of note, with respect to incognizant practice, that the vague "what the director wants to communicate to the world" is as far as Pixar seems to attempt in interrogating the practice of feature film storytelling. Pixar starts the writing with very rough outlines:

> You pitch to the brain trust – a group of the other Pixar directors. One of the most unique aspects of our studio is that you get feedback from your peers. And peers who are very committed to your success, as much as you are to theirs… You can call on individuals or the whole Trust at any point to get the feedback you need. In that first year you're pitching twenty minute overviews of the story, getting feedback, and rethinking. We often spend a whole year in outlining before going to a first draft.
>
> (Myers, 2012, Part 2)

This is a highly unusual workflow. The idea of using this level of resource at the development stage is atypical, as very few organisations have the financial capacity to support such a process, nor the talent to make it worthwhile. It is worth contrasting this with the typical workflow at this stage for a live-action feature film, which for sake of parity is a typical studio-film workflow. A good example is *Star Wars VII: The Force Awakens* (Abrams, 2015), also a studio film, also a franchise, also Disney and also with Michael Arndt taking screenwriting duties.

One of the largest studio franchises of all time, on Nov 8, 2012 Arndt was hired to write the screenplay, which he worked on for 11 months (Kit, 2013). At this point, it is typical that as a commissioned 'gun-for-hire' he would be working to a loose plan, but with no constant micro-pitching of ideas during the drafting stage as in the Pixar workflow. He would turn in a draft which would receive notes from different stakeholders (likely to be primarily

producer Kathleen Kennedy, director J.J. Abrams and project consultants Lawrence Kasdan and Simon Kinberg) before applying them to the next rewrite. After 11 months of writing, Arndt was still hitting story problems and asked for 18 more, but instead of the Pixar 'artist-first' approach, Disney took the 'release-date first' approach and fired Arndt – replacing him with Abrams and Kasdan in order to make the pre-determined release date (it is an industry standard approach to 'date' blockbuster films years in advance (give a release date), and the process revolves around meeting that deadline, rather than getting the story ready).

At Pixar, once there is a first draft of the screenplay (in *Toy Story 3's* case, Arndt was brought in as soon as the idea was chosen, as pitched by director Lee Unkrich) there is usually a table read (actors or just Pixar employees who like to act), and then:

> [W]hile the writer is incorporating the Brain Trust notes into a second draft, a team of story artists begin drawing out the movie, like the comic book... It's a visual rough draft of the whole thing… The Brain Trust watches these reels and gives frank – sometimes painfully frank! – feedback. You spend the next 2-3 years in the process of putting up reels, getting feedback, and going back to the drawing board before going into full production for the final 1-2 years of this process.
>
> (Myers, 2012, Part 2)

In this way, the Pixar workflow differs from a traditional workflow as the film is being directed whilst it is being written, the visual trial-and-error feeding back into the scripting trial-and-error:

> [W]hile writing the second draft, they're [the writer] is working side by side with the eight or so story artists who are drawing the movie… It's a truly unique experience for a screenwriter because they're not only collaborating with the director, but also with this very talented group of visual storytellers. The drawings feed the written word just as much as the written word feeds the story boards… we don't use professional actors until the last few reels.
>
> (Myers, 2012, Part 2)

This process in the live-action studio franchise world would be along the lines of:

- Script is delivered by the screenwriter (often not the screenwriter that was first hired).

- Director does their own draft of the screenplay, either themselves, with the original writer or a new writer. Ideally, the creative voice will be maintained, but often it is modified or changed completely. Depending how subtle the voice, the stakeholders may not even be aware (or in some cases, even care) that it has been altered.
- Script may be rewritten to make certain roles more attractive to 'marquee-value' talent (in *The Force Awakens*, this could be to ensure Harrison Ford returned to the franchise).
- Minor rewrites based on casting and rehearsals (certain cast members may not be a perfect fit for their role, so dialogue/character interactions are subtly altered).
- More rewrites during production to solve physical production problems or new ideas/opportunities discovered during production. Usually these rewrites are done by a different writer, one who is used to working at speed.
- Final further rewrites during post-production, either to help construct a re-edit, pick-ups or looping changes. Looping is the Automated Dialogue Replacement (ADR) process whereby the actor re-records their own voice in a studio for more flexibility in sound design and mixing.

This non-Pixar workflow demonstrates how maintaining a consistent vision is difficult when it comes to the rigors of industrial production. All creative elements of a screenplay contribute to the logical through-line of a well-constructed argument, but each stakeholder in a production has different priorities and this can have disastrous effects and is why so many films 'fail' when it comes to the internal goods of the practice. In an ideal production, each stakeholder would have their own priorities but will have signed on to the making the 'same film' (e.g. 'same vision', 'same argument'). The Pixar method takes such a unified approach to the collaboration, that the vision of the piece can be maintained throughout – or evolved naturally over the course of the process – and the fact that *Toy Story 3* is an animation actually works in its favour as an exemplar. In animation, every frame is pored – if not obsessed – over by many minds, so it is almost impossible for a casual, unnoticed element to be in the frame – such as the continuity errors that plague almost all live-action films – or on the soundtrack. (The Star Wars universe perhaps has the most notable of these errors, when it went unnoticed in *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977) that a Stormtrooper had misjudged a doorframe

and hit their head to unintended comic effect). This allows for much more precise level of control of the frame, and therefore more precise storytelling and argumentation.

In summary, described purely in process terms, Pixar's ability to wholly control the creative process from concept-to-screen bestows *Toy Story 3* exemplar status as a true demonstration of practitioner intention. However, its use as an exemplar would be meaningless if the film did not achieve success as defined by this thesis, namely moved the audience to a worthwhile conclusion in a worthwhile way. The following section will articulate and interrogate both the argument and conclusion of *Toy Story 3*, demonstrate how these manifest themselves in purely cinematic terms with reference to the compensations, and finally assess their qualification as 'worthwhile'.

7.2 *Toy Story 3* – Classic Cinematic Argument

Although there will be consistent reference to the screenplay on which the film is based, to most efficiently interrogate all elements of the thesis (including all literary and cinematic argumentative devices and the process of translation from one to the other) it is necessary to analyse *Toy Story 3* as a final screen work currently available to the audience in a variety of viewable formats.

Toy Story 3 – Synopsis

The film begins with a toy adventure all set in young boy (and toy owner) Andy's head. WOODY (Cowboy), BUZZ (Astronaut), JESSIE (Cowgirl), BULLSEYE (Horse), and SLINK (a slinky dog) are the goodies, MR & MRS POTATO HEAD, THE THREE ALIENS and REX (Dinosaur) are the baddies, with HAM (Piggy Bank) as the master villain. Up until the climax, the audience is in the world of the adventure (in the real wild west) but as the goodies save the day, we cut to what is really happening – Andy playing with toys in his room. The sequence continues with a montage to show Andy growing up, until about twelve years old.

The main story of the film opens with the toys in a trunk, about to execute an important plan. They have two phones in there with them – a landline handset and a mobile. Rex dials from the landline and the mobile rings. We hear Andy searching for his phone. Then the lid opens and we see Andy is now *seventeen*.

He takes his phone from Rex (who won't let go). The rules are consistent with what the first two films have established – the toys have to go inanimate when a human can see

them. Andy wrenches the phone from Rex, thinks for a brief moment about his toys, then throws Rex back in the trunk and blames his sister for taking his phone.

Once he has left, the toys get out. It was all a ruse to get Andy to play with them again. Leader Woody makes an announcement and tells them that that was their last, best chance, and now they should "close up shop" and prepare for life in the attic. It is not a thrilling prospect for any of them, despite their being other toys up there. There is a debate (also widely discussed by the characters in Toy Story 2) about loyalty to Andy: a toy's duty is 'to be there' for their owner whenever they want to play with them. But what to do when their owner grows up and doesn't want to play with them anymore? How long should their loyalty last? They all love Andy, but now their future is unclear. Woody is adamant – as long as they are owned by Andy, they should always be there, even if in the attic. Mr. Potato Head, always the voice of dissention, disagrees – but there is no consensus reached before they are interrupted.

Andy is leaving for college in a few days and his mother wants him to clear out his room, things need to either be taken to college, put in the attic or thrown away. She mentions that Andy should think about donating his old toys to Sunnyside Daycare, as they are always looking for new toys for the kids. Hassled and irritated, Andy tells her that they're all junk and no-one would want them. He looks at his toys, plastic bin liner in hand and puts all in except Woody, who he is going to take to college with him. Andy is going to put the bag in the attic, but his mother thinks it is trash and throws the bag out by mistake. Woody sees this, but the toys in the bag do not. The toys escape and climb into Andy's mother's car – into the donation box for Sunnyside. They are hurt by what they feel was a betrayal by Andy and think they would be better off going somewhere where they might be played with. Woody follows, and again there is the debate about their duty to their owner – especially as this was just a mistake. But suddenly the door shuts and all are taken to the daycare centre.

The toys are welcomed by the Sunnyside toys, led by big pink bear LOTSO, an affable old patriarch and KEN (a figurine). Ken makes an instant (and inevitable connection with BARBIE (thrown out by Andy's sister). All but Woody are excited that Sunnyside never runs out of children to play with, a veritable paradise for a toy. But Woody sees this as a betrayal of Andy – and after a mean-spirited argument with best friend Buzz, Woody leaves them there and makes his way out.

Things do not go to plan, and instead of getting back to Andy, Woody is picked up by sweet young four-year-old Bonnie, whose mother works at the daycare centre. She brings him home and plays with him and her other toys, and – despite himself – Woody enjoys it. Then

he learns a dark truth from a miserable clown toy called CHUCKLES. He explains that he, Lotso, and BIG BABY (a large battered baby doll) had a lovely owner called DAISY who adored Lotso the most. She lost them on a family outing, but when they managed to finally struggle home Lotso had already been replaced. Lotso snapped – he told Big Baby Daisy had replaced all of them and they ran away, finding Sunnyside. The newly-bitter Lotso took control, turning the centre into a toy prison run on his rules. Chuckles only escaped when Bonnie took him home.

Back at Sunnyside, Andy's toys are thrilled for their first real playtime in years, but are put in the toddlers' room and brutalized by the young children who play nicely but roughly. Buzz asks Lotso to move them to one of the older children's rooms, but the nature of Sunnyside is revealed. Lotso is using them as cannon-fodder – they need new toys for the toddlers' room, as most don't last long. Before he can escape and tell the others, Lotso and his cronies (big toys) return Buzz to his original factory setting, both erasing his memory and returning his personality to that off by-the-book obedient soldier.

At around the same time Mrs. Potato Head, through an eye she lost in Andy's room, sees Andy searching for them. They realize Woody *was* telling the truth and try to leave. Unfortunately, they find themselves literally imprisoned in the room with Buzz as their guard.

Woody returns to Sunnyside to save his friends. He learns from a world-weary CHATTER TELEPHONE that the only way out is through the trash chute. Woody finds his old friends. They are overjoyed to see him and he rescues them from Buzz, but in doing so Buzz is accidentally reset to Spanish mode instead of his original persona.

Spanish Buzz instantly falls in love with Jessie and (incorrectly) sees Woody as a romantic rival. In a complex prison-break sequence, the toys make it all the way to the trash chute, and are about to escape to freedom when they are ambushed by Lotso and his gang. Ken, still in love with Barbie changes sides and joins Woody. As a garbage truck approaches, Woody reveals Lotso's deception to Big Baby, who in an act of revenge throws Lotso into a dumpster about to be collected. Woody and the gang jump over the dumpster to escape, but Lotso grabs Woody's leg and drags him down with him. The rest of the toys fall into dumpster trying to rescue him (except Barbie, Ken and Big Baby) as the garbage truck picks it up.

A television falls on Buzz, and his original memory and personality return. The truck drops the toys into a landfill, and the Aliens are swept away by a digger. The rest of the toys find themselves on a conveyor belt that recycles metal – and chops up the rest. They all hold onto something magnetic that will lift them (with the metal) over the spinning chopper – but

Lotso is stuck. Despite his misdeeds, Woody and Buzz risk their lives to help him. All avoid the chopper, but then realize the conveyor belt now leads to an incinerator. Woody and Buzz help Lotso reach an emergency stop button, only for Lotso to betray them again – abandoning them to escape. The toys fall into the incinerator and realize finally, that this is their end. They stop struggling to escape and hold hands as the heat is about to melt them. But at the final moment a GIANT MECHANICAL CLAW reaches down and pulls them clear, operated by the Aliens. Lotso is found by a GARBAGE TRUCK DRIVER, who remembering the bear as a beloved old toy, ties him to his truck's radiator grille and drives away. Woody and the other toys board another truck back to Andy's house.

Now safe at home, Woody helps the other toys into a box for the attic before saying his goodbyes and getting in a different box bound for college. The room now empty, Andy's mom walks in – only to have an emotional moment, declaring to Andy that she wishes she "could always be with him". He hugs her and tells her she always will be. This strikes a chord with Woody and he has a change of heart. As they leave the room, he jumps out of the box, grabs a sticky-note and pen and writes a hasty note which he sticks to the top of the box full of his friends, before jumping in himself.

Andy reads the note and, thinking the note is from his mother, donates the toys to Bonnie. It is not easy for Andy, especially when – to his surprise – he finds Woody is at the bottom of the box. He's even more surprised when Bonnie recognizes him. Initially he takes Woody back, but then – realizing they have some special connection – passes Woody on to Bonnie, and they play together all afternoon. Woody and the other toys watch Andy go and say their silent goodbyes as they begin their new lives with Bonnie.

Over the credits, we see life in the new version of Sunnyside. Barbie and Ken have taken over, and it is now a lovely place to be with a fair 'tag-team' system of being played with by the young ones.

Toy Story 3 – The Argument

> To appreciate a film as a work of art adequately one must ask how successfully its themes have been expressed or embodied by its style and by devices specific to the medium.
>
> (Livingston, 2006, p. 16)

As the study examined in Chapter 5, the concept of 'argument' is given various different names in the film industry, the two most common being 'the vision' and 'the controlling idea' (McKee, 1998, p. 115). Essentially, both can be reduced to the idea of a narrative feature film having a singular theme and singular (but not necessarily simple) attitude to that theme. The dominant thinking allows for sub-themes and unlimited narrative complexity, but the 'idea' that 'controls' all elements of the narrative is singular – and the simpler the better. This is not to say that the argument has to be obvious or redundant, just expressed so as to be accessible to the intended audience.

Toy Story 3 is used as an exemplar, as even though the synopsis is a largely uninflected account of the key moments of the film, the argument the film is attempting to make is signposted with great clarity. To use the terms of the thesis, the worthwhile conclusion the film is attempting to move the audience to in a worthwhile way could be expressed thus: friendships and relationships should not be thought of as requiring eternal loyalty under any and all circumstances, so in order to live a fulfilled life – manifested by the ability to form new meaningful friendships and relationships – it is necessary, however emotionally painful, to sever or transform an existing friendship or relationship that has lost its intrinsic value. In the scenario specific to *Toy Story 3*, in order to thrive, Woody must 'move on' from original friend and owner Andy (not necessarily sever the friendship, but certainly move it from a primary relationship to a secondary one) as their friendship has lost its intrinsic value. In this case, through no fault of his own, Andy has grown older and essentially grown out of his toys (who will never change) which means he never plays with them anymore – and the intrinsic value of this particular friendship is that Andy thrives as he plays with the toys, and the toys thrive because he plays with them. When Andy no longer fulfils his side of the friendship contract, it loses value for all concerned. If the toys attempt to 'hold on' to the friendship with Andy, flagged in the film as a sense of loyalty and duty "to always be there for him", it will mean they will fail to thrive as they will, at best, spend decades sitting unplayed-with in the attic.

In order to effectively defend the thesis using *Toy Story 3* as an exemplar, the study has to establish:

(a) that this is the correct conclusion.

(b) that this conclusion is worthwhile.

(c) how precisely the film constructs a compelling argument using cinematic tools; and

(d) how the film does this in a worthwhile way that does not rely on unreasonable manipulation or reliance on the compensations.

To first address *(b), that the above conclusion is worthwhile* can be made with recourse to the realms of edifying and unedifying arguments. This is not yet a question of technique, just whether the assertion has any intrinsic value. As mentioned in Chapter 2, an edifying conclusion can be defined as one that is both plausible and significant. If the conclusion is wholly implausible, the argument constructed in support of it will in all likelihood be specious. Alternatively, if the conclusion is trivial, it is not worthwhile. The question of whether or not the conclusion is true is, perhaps counter-intuitively, not a strict requirement. *Toy Story 3* gives a conclusion around ideas of loyalty and friendship that, whilst accessible and plausible, are certainly complex and perhaps even counter-intuitive to a child still learning how to make and maintain friendships. The idea that personal loyalty does not *necessarily* mean blindly committing to the romantic ideal of (to use 'tween parlance) a B.F.F. (Best Friend Forever) is something that requires a strongly developed sense of emotional stability, confidence and maturity. Therefore, the exemplar can be said to be drawing an edifying conclusion.

How to read a dramatic argument

To prove *(a), that the above is the correct conclusion* it is also necessary to simultaneously explore *(c), precisely how the film constructs a compelling argument using cinematic tools*. In previous chapters, the study has defined filmic arguments as ones that aim to convince us of a stated assertion, providing us reasons to believe within a dramatic context. To isolate the key thematic element of an argument is a process of observing what idea is being consistently tested, almost on a scene-by-scene basis, by the film. To initially use a McKee-esque analysis, it would be to find "the story's ultimate meaning," by seeing what exactly is "expressed through the action and aesthetic emotion of the last act's climax," (McKee, 1998, p. 112). As discussed in Chapter 5, McKee's equivalent to cinematic argumentation is the 'Controlling Idea', defined as Value plus Cause, where 'Value' is the central thematic concept which

includes a positive or negative judgement. McKee also states that scene-by-scene "positive idea and counter idea argue back-and-forth until at climax one voice wins," and is revealed as the controlling idea (McKee, 1998, p. 119).

With regard to the exemplar, what is the action and aesthetic emotion of the last act's climax? For McKee, aesthetic emotion is essentially meaningful emotional experience (McKee, 1998, p. 111). The last climax of *Toy Story 3* is Woody telling Andy (via a note that he knows Andy will mistake to be from Andy's mom) to pass on the toys to Bonnie – and Andy doing it, with a little resistance when he realizes that Woody is in the box along with the rest of is old toys. The emotions are strong – the physical and emotional separation of two friends – but the meaning in context is clear – both parties are better for it, and there is yet another beneficiary – Bonnie.

To examine the film using McKee's 'Controlling Idea', the 'Value' must be friendship, as expressed through ideas of *loyalty*. The positive idea is that friendship is defined by *unrelenting loyalty*, the negative counter-idea that *loyalty has limits*. The relationship is not that of the toys to each other, but of the toys to their owner Andy. This play between idea and counter-idea is present in almost every scene in the film. It is first (and necessarily) flagged as a central concept at the start of the film, as conventional narrative feature filmmaking dictates, when Woody and the other toys try (and fail) for one last play time with Andy. What follows is a robust discussion between the toys about their future, and the thematic battle-lines are drawn with the key thematic question articulated in the dialogue, paraphrased here as *'despite our positive history/love, what loyalty do we not have to a relationship when clearly the other party has moved on?'* Essentially that represents two choices – either cling on to the past with ever diminishing returns (this is demonstrated by an articulation of what failure looks like: the toys being consigned to the attic – safe, but never being fulfilled again, other than the long shot that Andy will someday have kids and they might want to play with them) or move on to the scary unknown (demonstrated at the start by not defining what this means for the toys).

This unknown becomes more formed with the option of Sunnyside, but it is still a 'newness' that contains its own inherent terrors. Even when the toys discover the daycare centre is essentially a corrupt prison and want to escape, it still presents the dramatic question of 'what now?' The attic might be a refuge, but hardly a long-term solution: to return home cowed, however grateful to be alive, is not presented in the film as a positive option as the previous realities of life in the attic are not questioned or modified. In would represent a possible, if unsatisfying end to the narrative and would form an assertion along the lines of

'you should retain loyalty out of fear of your life. There is worse out there'. This argumentative move would not work as 'life' is not the theme – it would instead create two themes: loyalty *and* survival, and they will begin to conflict.

However, this is not to deny that there are sub-themes. As long as there is one overarching theme and argument being made, there can be any number of sub-themes or sub-arguments, as long as they augment, not undermine the central thesis of the film. A good example of this in *Toy Story 3* is furnished by looking at the film's narrative from Andy's perspective. Another way of isolating the main theme and argument of the mainstream narrative feature film is simply to ask what the main character learns (or as the study examined with *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (Hill, 1970) in Chapter 2, what the main character does not learn – to their detriment). This is not always as simple as it seems, as it is not always clear precisely who the main character is – either to the practitioner or the audience. Consider another highly successful animated film, *Frozen* (Buck & Lee, 2013). Is the main character Anna or Elsa? Both have the same journey. Is this a case, as in the aforementioned *Lethal Weapon* (Donner, *1987*), of 'dual protagonist'? A similar argument could be made for Andy being the main character, or at least an equal dual protagonist with Woody, as he has a similar journey and performs the final dramatic action in the film (giving Woody away to Bonnie). However, categorizing Andy as the main character would be incorrect, as his epiphany is instead a good example of a *sub-thematic* argument. Andy comes to understand the need to move on in relationships that have lost their intrinsic value, but it is through the prism of coming-of-age; what Andy learns is the need to fully let go of your childhood in order to become an adult. This is demonstrated by Andy finally passing over Woody, his final and most beloved toy. If he were to keep Woody and take him to college, it would be a metaphor for not fully moving on.

Further sub-thematic arguments worthy of mention, especially in the light of *Toy Story 4* (Cooley, 2019), are those concerning religion, community and parenthood. The religious argument implicit in this series views children as God-like beings who give a toy's life meaning and value through their imagination during play; less a conventional friendship than a deity-acolyte relationship. 'To be played with' is to live a meaning life. As Andy gets older, he is no longer the source of meaning, and neither are the younger children who damage the toys through inappropriate play. The community argument relates to Woody's connection to the rest of the gang. If he goes to college, the gang will be broken up, and the recognition of the need of community is one that is tacitly made by Woody at the close of the film. Woody could also be used to represent not Andy's friend or acolyte, but father-figure – scared of his

son outgrowing him and learning to deal with that loss. These arguments are sub-thematic as they are worthwhile, valid and complementary to the main argument – but less fully developed, providing less reasons to believe their conclusions and not always providing a conclusion to the problem-as-stated: the religious metaphor is not developed in the story, the conception of 'play' left vague and the viewer invited to interpret the Woody-Andy relationship as conventional friendship (not sense of awe of hierarchy present); the community aspect is not highlighted or raised as a thematic concern and the parenthood aspect is inconsistent (is it an awkward stretching of the metaphor if Woody being passed on to Bonnie is supposed to represent the grandparent-grandchild relationship). It is interesting to note that *Toy Story 4* has developed the parent/grandparent metaphor further, although it is primarily making a case for personal evolution late in life; knowing when it is time not just for post-child/owner life, but new community life.

To further delineate how *Toy Story 3* sets out its argument with such success, it is worth revisiting Aristotle's theory of argumentation previously discussed in Chapter 2, namely the concepts of ethos, logos and pathos from *Rhetoric*, as well as the foundational concept of 'suspension of disbelief' as outlined in Chapter 5. To start with the latter, before a film can convince an audience of an assertion it must simultaneously convince the audience in all other areas of story: that the world, characters, situations and resolution (or non-resolution) is authentic. Failure in any area weakens the argument. Suspension of disbelief relates directly to genre, with comedies (especially animated ones) given more latitude than domestic drama. Essentially, the film must convince the audience that the film world is believable enough for them to invest their emotions in it, that the characters are believable, that the situations are believable and the outcome(s) are believable. If each element of the narrative feature film is convincing, then the argument may convince an audience. *Toy Story 3* has the foundation of a successful argument as it delivers an authenticity to world, character and situation within the genre conventions of animated comedy.

Building on this foundation, *Toy Story 3* then also conforms quite clearly to Aristotle's three modes of persuasion. Firstly, *ethos:* that the film comes from a credible source. The definition of 'source' being the internal credibility of the screen world has been validated in the above discussion of suspension of disbelief. Considering the idea that those presenting the film have credibility, this is where both the studio and the franchise become relevant. *Toy Story 3* comes from Disney/Pixar. As discussed, the track record of Pixar as a mini-studio is second-to-none, and the cultural impact of Disney is immeasurable. Both *Toy Story* (Lasseter, 1995) & *Toy Story 2* (Lasseter, 1999) were critically and commercially successful, so the

source of *Toy Story 3* is a highly credible one. The two prior films of the series also help establish the authenticity and consistency of the fictional world of Toy Story 3. Because consistent and deeply imagined, this is a credible, believable world.

Secondly, *logos*: that the argument is internally logical. As was mentioned previously, the central thesis of the film is one that should be tested scene by scene, and *Toy Story 3* does this in a highly efficient manner. As noted in the McKee analysis, the central thematic question of *'how to remain loyal when the other party in the friendship has moved on?'* is raised at the start of the film, but then is revisited and developed at regular intervals, as follows:

- When the toys escape from the trash
- At Sunnyside when Woody leaves for the first time
- At Bonnie's when Woody enjoys himself
- When Smiles tells his story about Lotso
- The confrontation at the garbage chute
- When Lotso betrays the toys on the conveyor belt
- When the toys settle for the attic
- When Andy's Mom enters Andy's empty room
- When Andy donates the toys, including Woody

It is worth noting, that some of these thematic moments are more explicit than others and exist on three levels of presentation. When the toys escape from the trash and when Woody leaves Sunnyside for the first time the thematic ideas are stated plainly in the dialogue – the characters are literally debating the core thematic idea (with Woody arguing for loyalty) in what could be labelled 'direct thematic dialogue'. A less obvious form of presentation of core thematic ideas are moments such as Andy's Mom enters his room, or the toys settle for the attic – there is dialogue around the core thematic idea but it is either oblique or sub-textual. In this study, this category will be referred to as 'indirect thematic dialogue'. The final category is demonstrated in the moment when Woody enjoys himself with Bonnie, in a very effective non-dialogue story beat played out purely through action – what the study will class as 'thematic action'. As Linda Seger puts it:

> Once you know what to say, you also need to know how to say it. Theme is the least interesting when it's communicated through talky dialogue, when it's said rather than expressed through more dramatic means. Although lines of dialogue here and there

> can express the theme… the theme will be far better expressed by concentrating on other more cinematic choices".
>
> (Seger, 1994, p. 129)

It should also be noted that in laying out the logic of the argument, *Toy Story 3* demonstrates a common approach where the precise thematic question is laid out in the dialogue, but the answer (and hence the conclusion to the argument) is formed in thematic action. The answer as to why this is a common approach can be found in an examination of these "cinematic choices" and Aristotle's third category of *pathos*.

For Aristotle, in order to win an argument, the senses and emotions have to be invoked. This can certainly be done with simple emotively written text, but as the study explored in Chapter 2, the engagement of the emotions and senses is where cinema excels, especially over the written word. It is one thing to be told that someone is attractive, quite another to experience that attractiveness for yourself. As Cox and Levine pointed out, it is cinema's ability to invoke feelings that makes it so superbly efficient at making impactful arguments (Cox and Levine, 2012, p.5).

Chapters 2 and 5 noted that the conversion from script to screen is a process of interpretation, adaptation and transportation, using a myriad of tools specific and often unique to the visual and audio arts. What has so far been discussed regarding *Toy Story 3* are techniques that are wholly text-based without specific recourse to how these moments are delivered with sound and vision to the audience (all discussions could have been identical by referring only to the screenplay). Therefore, is it necessary to move onto a second stage of *(c) how precisely the film constructs a compelling argument using cinematic tools.* This will also refer back to the cinematic techniques and first principles outlined in Chapter 5.

To focus on one specific scene, near the end of the film the toys end up fighting for their lives at the dump, and at one point all appears lost. Below is how the moment was written in the original screenplay:

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Woody grabs Rex's hand, slides further toward the inferno.

They are all being pulled inescapably downward.

There's no way out. Jessie looks at Buzz.
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JESSIE

Buzz...! What do we do?

Buzz looks at her. He reaches out, takes her hand.

Jessie grabs Bullseye’s hoof. Slinky takes Hamm’s hand.

Hamm reaches out to Rex. The Potato Heads hold each other.

Mr. Potato Head grabs Rex.

Buzz reaches out to Woody...

Woody takes Buzz’s hand, and the circle is complete.

As they approach the vortex, heat waves blast their faces.

The Toys close their eyes, turn away.

Woody stares at the fire, shuts his eyes.

This is the end.

A LIGHT from above shines in Woody’s face.

He opens his eyes.

A giant mechanical Claw lowers towards them.

The Claw plunges into the trash around them, closing them in its grip, then raises them up.

They soar into the air, away from the ROARING incinerator.

Woody looks around in disbelief. The Claw spins, passing in front of the crane booth.

INT. CRANE OPERATOR'S BOOTH - NIGHT

In the booth, the Aliens man the joysticks.

ALIENS
The Clawwwww!!!

They lean into the joystick, steering the Claw to safety.

(Arndt, 2010, pp. 117-118)

The sequence is emotive, even on the page, but on the screen the emotion is further driven and manipulated by elements not on the page. To refer back to Cox & Levine's comments in Chapter 2 that over and above the written word, "Film however has an even larger bag of tricks than novels… And films show us faces; they give full rein to our capacity to read faces and grasp the significance of gesture. A novelist has to say or hint at things a filmmaker can simply show," (2012, p. 11). Seger further talks specifically how theme (as she conceptualizes it) can be best communicated by image, "One of the most important methods for communicating theme focuses on the images chosen by the writer, and later by the director… You might use images of light and dark to show good and evil, or small versus large spaces to show oppression versus freedom," (Seger, 1994, p. 130).

The most dominant element not referenced at any time in the script is music. Scored by Randy Newman, which gives the sequence a gravitas, seriousness and sense of scale that is not present in any other part of the film. As an audience we are mostly confident that no harm will befall the toys, but are never completely sure – especially as this is a sequence near the end of a second sequel. As referenced in Chapters 5 and 6, music is emotional information that tells the audience the emotional significance of the scene. Here, the music pushes the significance of the moment. Perhaps the best illustration of this is to imagine music that is comedic and comforting. It would indicate that everyone is going to be safe and undermine the drama of the situation.

Another technique that is not indicated on the page is that of juxtaposition. It is unworkable to constantly remind the reader of the look of each character – but the script does not remind the reader of the visual juxtaposition of harmless, childlike toys in a horrific situation. This juxtaposition is aided by various cinematic and visual tricks, primarily character design (most of the toys have large eyes that invite audience empathy, Jessie's hand is made to look much more human as Buzz takes it) and production design – the environment is utterly hellish with the palette completely made up from reds, yellows and oranges that communicate extreme heat.

Further, more exclusively cinematic techniques maximize the dramatic tension and emotional reaction from the audience. The scene is about the toys accepting their own deaths. Buzz is first to do this in the exchange with Jessie, and it should be noted that in a film that is dialogue-heavy, this moment becomes completely non-verbal. The question of "What should we do?" is answered simply by an offer of a hand. As the central protagonist with the main character trait of 'never giving up', the key moment of the scene is when Woody finally stops struggling and takes Buzz's hand. It is here that the film uses the standard techniques of giving Woody a bigger close-up than anyone else – communicating both the significance of his character and the moment – and allowing that moment to be read in all its subtlety and complexity.

Another unique cinematic technique that maximizes emotional impact is editing. The timing of the sequence is one that cannot be replicated in the written form and is critical to the viewing experience. The toys struggle for a long time, and the seeing of this struggle is difficult to watch – yet it is a delicate balance. Too much struggle, and the viewer is bored, not enough and they are not experiencing the moment fully – and this sense of struggle and desperation is one that is most efficiently communicated on the screen rather than the page. The director here made the toys struggle for 30 seconds before Buzz takes Jessie's hand. The time taken between Woody accepting his own death and the rescue is a further 27 seconds. This is much longer than is indicate on the page, which reads at approximately 10 seconds. Again, this timing is crucial for the audience to wrestle with the potential for the toy's demise, even if they resist it fully. *Toy Story 3* stretches this duration to breaking point – pushing, especially the adult section of the audience, to consider the death of the toys, before giving them the release of a happy end to the sequence.

To return to Aristotle, this emotional engagement is key to the film arguing effectively. The sequence is a culmination of a path that should not have been taken, Woody

being punished for clinging to Andy, the others for severing, rather than evolving their relationship with their owner.

As much as all storytelling is manipulation on some level, it is however possible to successfully emotionally engage but to do so in an unauthentic, cynical way that does not further the argument. As the study examined in Chapter 4, *mother!* (Aronofsky, 2017) may have been a particularly high-profile example of the audiences' emotions being engaged to no edifying end, but it is also possible for a film to have an edifying conclusion that is not argued in the worthwhile way, perhaps through manipulations in ethos, logos or pathos as outlined in Chapter 6. This is not always by design. With so many creative and institutional elements to balance, mainstream narrative feature filmmaking is a difficult process that requires both a mastery of the craft and stakeholders that share the same vision for the project. This is a significant reason why most films will fail by the internal goods of the practice, to a greater or lesser degree.

So, to answer (d), *how does Toy Story 3 construct a compelling argument in a worthwhile way that does not rely on unreasonable manipulation or reliance on the compensations?* To most effectively demonstrate this, let us imagine an alternate version of *Toy Story 3*, one that relies on compensations. To re-cap the complete list, they are as follows: *(1) Happy Endings; (2) Franchise; (3) Genre Conventions; (4) Casting & Performance; (5) Author; (6) Visual Pleasure; (7) Spectacle; (8) Sensation; (9) Wish Fulfilment; (10) Music; (11) Puzzle Solving; (12) Promise of the Premise/Obligatory Scene; (13) Recognition Of Self; (14) Dialogue; (15) Strong Sequences; (16) Based on a True Story; (17) The First; (18) Homage; (19) Fan service; (20) Obscurity, Chaos and/or Confusion.*

Toy Story 3 contains elements that could be viewed as compensations, specifically the contextual factors of *Franchise, Cast* and *Author*. As noted in Chapter 6, the use of a star (in this case, double-Oscar winner Tom Hanks as Woody) is always a contextual, rather than textual, benefit and a sequel within a successful franchise will always generate audience interest and engagement with the subject material. The same can be said for the promotion of Pixar as the 'author' of the film. The makers of *Toy Story 3* could have avoided these compensations by making the same argument through a standalone film not in the *Toy Story* universe, with a non-star cast and promoting the film minimizing the Pixar brand. However, although these elements are present, they are ultimately are not functioning as compensations as the film makes a functional and accessible argument.

To remind ourselves of the tests of whether or not a film element is functioning as a compensation: if (a) the film argument is functional, or (b) the element is integral to the

storytelling, the element is not a compensation. With regard to the latter, this can be proved by subtraction, as a compensation is an *additive* element or emphasis to compensate for flawed argument. The previous demonstration that *Toy Story 3* has a fully functioning argument by successfully applying (even obliviously) Aristotelian principles of persuasion goes much of the way to proving that it has no reliance on compensations, however, it is still necessary to examine each of them in turn:

(1) Happy Endings: The film does not have a 'happy' ending, rather a 'bittersweet' conclusion that gives not a comforting lie but a painful yet hopeful truth.
(3) Genre Conventions: The film is a children's adventure. This requires there to be action and different locales but each of the key locations or action set-pieces are used to further the story, such as Woody spending time with Bonnie in her home or the furnace sequence. If they were removed the argument would not make sense. No genre convention is used superfluously.
(6) Visual Pleasure: Although the animated images are pleasant to observe, the film does not present beauty (be it as character, location, machinery, colour or design) in excess of the needs of the narrative.
(7) Spectacle: Toy Story 3 has no large-scale impressive displays. The largest scale moment in the adventure is in the pre-credit sequence that all takes place in Andy's head. However, it is a brief sequence and duration is a critical component of measuring compensation: emphasis requires time or repetition.
(8) Sensation: There is no use of extreme sensation, which is usually more prevalent in horror, action and erotic/explicit thrillers and dramas.
(9) Wish Fulfilment: The film does not rely on any of the four categories of wish fulfilment (narrative-led, character-led, universe-led or sensation-led). The audience is not invited to want to be Woody, exist in the live-toy world, nor revel in the voyeuristic pleasure of the image. Narratively, Woody does not get what he wants but what he needs – and this is integral to the argument, not an untethered happy ending.
(10) Music: There are no extended musical sequences, or music given such prominence or screen time to function as a compensation. If the music were removed, the emotional engagement (and the argument) would suffer.
(11) Puzzle Solving: Although like most films, *Toy Story 3* uses Noel Carroll's 'erotetic' micro question-and-answer model, the film does not function as a mystery.

(12) Promise of the Premise/Obligatory Scene: *Toy Story 3* is not a 'high concept' story that contains an obligatory scene that is a key joy to the overall narrative experience. The only scene that could be regarded as obligatory is the final scene with Andy, when we ultimately find out what happens to the toys. However, this is integral to the argument so is not a compensation in the same way that yet another car chase would be in the *Fast & Furious* franchise (2001-).

(13) Recognition Of Self: As has been previously noted, this significant alignment between character and audience member is a difficult compensation to encode at the time of creation, and the hyper-real character world of *Toy Story 3* further makes this compensation less likely. A general sense of identification with a character or characters is key to provoke empathy, but 'Recognition Of Self' requires a fundamental connection. Films that traditionally pursue this connection as compensation are dramas that have singular leads and often under-represented leads, such as Chiron from *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016) or coming-of-age dramedies, such as *Edge of Seventeen* (Craig, 2016) where every significant plot-point for the protagonist is designed to provoke recognition.

(14) Dialogue: Much like the categories of *Visual Pleasure, Spectacle or Sensation,* there is no emphasis on the pleasures of dialogue that exceeds the needs of the narrative.

(15) Strong Sequences: Although there are many compelling action sequences that fulfil genre conventions and the *Promise of the Premise*, they neither have the spectacle nor the duration that would qualify them as a 'Strong Sequence' able to compensate for flaws in the storytelling.

(16) Based on a True Story & *(17) The First: Toy Story 3* neither claims to be based on a true story nor is the 'first' in any category of storytelling.

(18) Homage: Whilst there is homage to many feature films of the past, most that should be familiar to *Toy Story 3*'s target audience, there is no reliance on them for engagement. This can be demonstrated simply by subtraction: would the story moment work without the reference to the other cultural product? For instance, there is a sequence where the toys are told about the prison rules and being put "in the box". This is an almost verbatim reference to *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (Lean, 1957), but the sequence works perfectly well without that piece of cultural knowledge, functioning as a simple 'rules of the world' sequence.

(19) Fan service: Rather than using the original highly sexual definition of fan service, which would immediately disqualify *Toy Story 3* from being able to operate in this way, this section refers back to Bart Beaty's more general definition of fan service to *"cater unabashedly to the audiences expressed desires"* and *"a series of narrative "awards""* (Beaty, 2016, p. 324),

that are established in a film. Using this definition, it is clear that *Toy Story 3* does not provide fan service, principally due to the fact that the audience does not demand it. This notion of 'reward' fails to be relevant as, unlike most comic book-to-film adaptations, there is no 'hardcore' audience, nor any appreciable hierarchy of fandom that will be rewarded for spotting an obscure reference over an obvious one, nor satisfied by the inclusion of a much loved character due to vocal lobbying of the practitioners. What references do exist in *Toy Story 3* function as homage, as outlined above.

(20) Obscurity, Chaos and/or Confusion: Defined in Chapter 6 as *"joy generated by the attempt to unravel a puzzle that can never be fully solved," Toy Story 3* is not constructed around a Barthian hermeneutic code, so this compensation is not present.

7.3 Conclusion

Toy Story 3 has been used to defend the thesis as it is one of the most accessible examples of successful cinematic argument in modern mainstream narrative cinema. In order to do this effectively, three foundational elements had to be proved, namely that the conclusion of the film was interpreted correctly, that the conclusion could be considered worthwhile, and that the argument was constructed in a worthwhile way. As part of this proof, the film's specific manifestation of cinematic methodology of argument was analysed and categorized.

So far, all elements *within* the film have been examined, yet there is one further factor that relates to the film as an indivisible whole which also significantly contributes to the argument being accepted or rejected by the viewer. This factor is complementary to, but sits apart from argument construction in that, as was explored in Chapter 2, the film functions as both the argument and the *evidence for that argument* simultaneously.

Noel Carroll and his fictional 'skeptic' go so far as to believe that film-as-evidence is a given, but think of film in terms of evidence being "cooked". For Carroll, films are "made up stories expressly designed to fit their general theme," where "the "evidence" has been constructed precisely to cast to best effect the general hypothesis the film is advocating," (Carroll 2006, p. 176).

In this way *Toy Story 3* is highly effective at communicating its argument, as it is not only successfully applying Aristotelian concepts of persuasion using cinematic tools, but also serves – as all mainstream narrative feature films do – as the evidence to support the conclusion that friendships and relationships should not be thought of as requiring eternal loyalty under any and all circumstances. What is wrong with saying that the evidence in the

film is “cooked” or that the film furnishes its own evidence, is that the film is not presenting an evidentiary argument (documentaries might; but fiction films like *Toy Story 3* most certainly do not). Fiction doesn’t furnish evidence in the ordinary sense of the term. But it nonetheless furnishes reasons to believe a conclusion. How does it do this? Not all reasons are evidentiary. Some are reminders. Some are conceptual, showing what is implied by commitments we already hold; or showing what is possible, given the concepts we hold. Some are invitations to imagine or to cognitively and affectively empathise with others and their fictional situation (from which we learn such things as what it is like to face a situation). All of these are reason generating: they can each give us good reason to hold one belief rather than another or make one commitment rather than another. The straightjacket of ‘evidentiary reasons’ is of no use to us.

Chapter Eight

The Counter-Example: *Mulholland Drive*

8.1 Why David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*?

In order to satisfactorily test the thesis, a strong potential counter-example must be chosen: a mainstream narrative feature film that appears to contradict the thesis by having *all* the external markers of fulfilling the internal good of the practice (being much loved by, and enduringly regarded as an artistic success by practitioners, critics and audiences alike) yet does not, by intention nor result, move the audience to a worthwhile conclusion in a worthwhile way. *Toy Story 3* is, by design, a most conventional mainstream narrative feature film so the counter-example should be as unconventional as the mainstream allows. If the thesis can survive this challenge, the case for its credibility is significantly strengthened.

To quickly summarise the scope and scale of the thesis, it is focused on feature films that are "deemed releasable" by a mainstream feature film distributor. This parameter is deliberately wide, especially as it does not even require the film be releasable in cinemas, but on any platform viewable by any screen device. However, it does disqualify visual art that, although created by the same technology, is essentially a non-screen industry work intended for release into art galleries and other non-traditional screen spaces.

Using these criteria, *Mulholland Drive* (Lynch, 2001) represents a powerful challenge to the thesis. As Todd McGowan, a critical theorist noted for his work on Lynch notes, it is a divisive work that "creates a filmic divide between the experience of desire and the experience of fantasy," (2004, p. 67), and is recognized as one of the most significant films of this century by film critics, with a 2016 BBC poll of 177 international film critics judging it the greatest film of the twenty-first century (Buckmaster, 2016). Screenwriter and director David Lynch was nominated for an American Academy Award as Best Director (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Ceremonies 2002), and other significant film practitioners and critics such as Richard Kelly (screenwriter and director of *Donnie Darko*, 2001), Jaco Van Dormael (director of the Camera D'or winning *Toto le Heros*, 1991), and Thierry Jousse (editor-in-chief of *Cahiers du Cinema* between 1991-1996) cite the film has one of the most impactful they have viewed (*In the Blue Box*, 2010). However, as this chapter will explore,

despite the uniformity of praise for the film, there continues to be both debate as to its meaning and even whether the film has – or should have – a meaning.

Mulholland Drive further serves as an effective counter-example as the cinematic history and methodology of David Lynch is in direct contrast to that of Pixar and *Toy Story 3* (2010) director Lee Unkrich. To use the Pixar pyramid of conventional storytelling, Lynch arguably sits somewhere in the top third, a less conventional storytelling approach appealing to smaller but still significant audiences. It is not necessary to detail a full biography here, but Lynch's work as an artist that exemplifies a mysterian philosophy and sensibility is well documented. Originally trained as an abstract-expressionist painter (Sheets, 2014) before studying under Frantisek (Frank) Daniel (formerly of F.A.M.U. in the former Czechoslovakia) who specialized in Russian dramatic art and the Slavic storytelling principles of the 'soul' and the irrational (Tabachnikova, 2016), Lynch started his feature film career with the experimental body horror film *Eraserhead* (1977), followed up by the conventional (but filmed in black and white) biopic *The Elephant Man* (1980), and the adaptation of the popular Frank Herbert science-fiction novel *Dune* (1984). However, Lynch is perhaps most associated with the series of what could be loosely labelled neo-noir films that started with *Blue Velvet* (1986) and continued with *Wild At Heart* (1990), *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992), a prequel to his *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991) television show, *Lost Highway* (1997), and *Mulholland Drive* (2001). Only *The Straight Story* (1999) is an outlier in this period, being a conventional road movie about a man using a drive-on tractor to visit an estranged brother who has recently suffered a stroke. Lynch also began working in television in 1989, and had great success with *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991). However, this could not be capitalized on and after two other cancelled TV shows (sitcom *On the Air* (1992) and anthology series *Hotel Room* (1993)) Lynch returned primarily to feature film.

An internationally high-profile screenwriter and director, Lynch is celebrated as a purely instinctive storyteller that specializes specifically in the surreal, his key films presented as dreams to be experienced by the viewer. In fact, his autobiography, a hybrid of biography and memoir is named *Room to Dream* (Lynch & McKenna, 2018) and he famously believes in using transcendental meditation as a creative tool. His book, *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness and Creativity* (2006), is named for the central metaphor he uses to express his understanding of the nature of ideas: if you stay in the psychological shallows you will only catch little fish, bigger fish require deeper waters. Xan Brooks of *The Guardian* newspaper notes that Lynch has the appearance "of a corn-fed American dreamer who simply likes to show his nightmares to the world," (Brooks, 2018). Just like real dreams, Lynch's

'film-dreams' are evocative yet elusive, and it is this elusiveness that appears not just to be the point, but a key part of his global appeal. Lynch is often feted by critics and other practitioners precisely *because* his films are opaque and full of inconsistencies, with no easily paraphrased meaning or deconstruction possible. This is what makes *Mulholland Drive*, the most feted work in Lynch's canon the best possible counter-example.

8.2 Mulholland Drive – Argument or Obfuscation?

It is relevant that, as American film scholar Jason Mittell notes, "the most acclaimed American film of this century was a television program," (2013, p. 27). *Mulholland Drive* was originally filmed as a television pilot, a follow-up to *Twin Peaks*. However, the network rejected it, and eighteen months later Lynch raised the money to complete the project as a feature film, shooting an additional eighteen minutes of footage. This is the reason for the mosaic-like structure of the narrative, with multiple characters and scenarios that were originally intended as the basis for longer storylines.

Mulholland Drive – Synopsis

The film begins with a montage of 1950s-style jive dancing with various couples moving to the music, although the film score playing simultaneously carries a more foreboding tone. The figures dissolve into the smiling face of BETTY (who we'll meet properly later), dressed glamorously, as if accepting an award. The off-screen crowd cheer. The image dissolves again, and we are in a darkened room. A softly moaning figure – as if in distress – rocks under some much less glamorous bedclothes.

A limousine drives down a dark winding road, revealed by a street sign to be Mulholland Drive. Inside sits RITA, a dark-haired woman in her twenties in cocktail party dress. The car stops, which disturbs her. She says, "What are you doing? We don't stop here." Instead of answering, the driver points a gun at her, but before he can shoot the limousine is hit by a car driven by drunk, high-spirited teens. Rita staggers out and struggles to downtown Los Angeles, sneaking in an apartment to rest. She falls asleep.

At a diner called *Winkies*, the awkward DAN tells his breakfast companion that he eats at this particular Winkies as he has recurrent nightmare where he is confronted by a HORRIBLE FIGURE in the car park. They investigate and the figure appears, and Dan collapses in fright.

Rita continues to sleep and we see a middle-aged man in wheelchair, MR. ROQUE, call a mysterious man (we do not see his whole face), telling him that, “the girl is still missing”. The mysterious man makes another call, answered by another person whose face we do not see. This person makes yet another call to a seedy motel phone next to an ashtray.

We now see BETTY, an aspiring actress, arrive at the airport with an OLD FRIENDLY COUPLE that she has met on the plane. When the couple leave her and get into a cab, they continue to smile huge forced fake smiles. Betty arrives at an apartment complex, to be met by MRS. LENOIX, but the woman tells her “Just call me Coco, everybody else does”. Coco shows Betty to her apartment (owned by Betty’s Aunt). After Coco leaves, Betty is shocked to find Rita there, who claims to be a friend of Betty’s Aunt. The two talk, Betty communicating her excitement to be in Hollywood, “this dream place.” Rita goes back to sleep.

Meanwhile director ADAM has his film taken over by two odd-acting MOBSTERS, and they demand he cast an unknown actress named CAMILLA RHODES as the star (Mr. Roque listens in from his office). Adam storms out.

Across town, JOE, an incompetent hit man attempts to steal a book full of phone numbers, but keeps killing people by mistake.

Betty speaks to her Aunt, and finds out that Rita was lying. Rita reveals she has amnesia (it’s now clear that Rita took her name from a film poster in the apartment). To help Rita remember who she is, Betty opens Rita's purse, revealing it contains a large amount of cash and an ODD BLUE KEY.

On returning home, Adam is beaten up and thrown out of his own house when he finds his wife cheating on him.

Betty and Rita go to Winkies to find out more about Rita’s car accident. A waitress called DIANE serves them, and Rita remembers the name DIANE SELWYN. They find Diane Selwyn in the phone book, but she does not answer their call.

After Adam learns his bank has cut him off, leaving him penniless, he agrees to meet a mysterious figure called THE COWBOY.

At the apartment, a ‘crazy’ older neighbour called LOUISE knocks on the door, telling Betty that something bad is happening, but seems confused as to who Betty is and who is in danger.

Adam meets The Cowboy on his ranch at night, and the man calmly suggests he cast Camilla Rhodes.

Rita helps Betty audition for a role, where Betty gives a clichéd, if well executed performance. Yet when Betty goes to the audition, despite the odd unprofessionalism of the others in the room, she makes a different, more sensual choice and gives an outstanding performance, which impresses everyone. Betty is taken to the studio where Adam is casting his film, *The Sylvia North Story.* Camilla Rhodes auditions and Adam resentfully picks her for the role. Adam and Betty briefly lock eyes – and the moment is significant – but Betty bolts before she can meet him, claiming she is late to see a friend.

Betty and Rita break-in to Diane Selwyn's apartment. In the bed, they find a woman's body – and she has clearly been dead for several days. Frightened that they are in danger, they go home where Rita disguises herself with a blonde wig. The distress connects them further, and that night Betty and Rita have sex. Rita starts talking Spanish in her sleep, and keeps saying "Silencio". She wakes Rita and insists they go to a theatre club called *Club Silencio*.

The EMCEE gives a convoluted speech about everything being an illusion. A singer comes on stage and sings Roy Orbison's 'Crying' in Spanish. She collapses but her voice continues, revealing it to be a recording. Both women are highly moved and cry, and Betty opens her purse to find a BLUE BOX inside that matches Rita's key. They return to the apartment, but when Rita finds the key she realises that Betty has disappeared. Rita unlocks the box, and it falls to the floor.

There is a short sequence where Betty's Aunt comes into the bedroom only to find it empty, before we see Diane in her own bed (we do not see her face). The Cowboy tells her to wake up, only to then realise that the body on the bed is dead. He leaves. Then Diane Selwyn wakes up in bed, clearly the same apartment that Betty and Rita broke in to. *She looks exactly like Betty*, but is a failed actress driven into a deep depression by her failed affair with Camilla Rhodes, a successful actress *who looks exactly like Rita*. Camilla invites Diane to a dinner party at Adam's house – on Mulholland Drive. Diane is driven alone in the back of a limousine, in a variation of the first scene with Rita. The car stops suddenly and Diane says the same line, "What are you doing? We don't stop here." This time, Camilla comes out of the bushes and leads Diane up to the party via a back way. Diane meets Adam's mother, *who looks exactly like Mrs. Lenoix*. This version also tells Diane to "Just call me Coco, everybody does".

At dinner, Diane mentions that she came to Hollywood when her Aunt Ruth died and left her an inheritance, and she and Camilla met when they auditioned for *The Sylvia North Story*. A woman who looks like the original "Camilla Rhodes" from earlier in the film kisses Camilla, and they smile awkwardly at Diane. Adam and Camilla try to make an

announcement that looks to be about their engagement, but can't stop themselves from kissing and laughing as Diane watches, tearful. We then see Diane meet hit man Joe (who looks the same) at *Winkies*, and it looks like she is paying him to kill Camilla. A stranger, Dan (also looks the same), notices them. Joe says that when the job is done, Diane will find a blue key in her apartment. When she asks what it is for, he just laughs.

Later, Diane stares at the blue key on her coffee table. Overcome by guilt, she hallucinates at she masturbates, eventually shooting herself after being chased by a cackling, nightmarish vision of the Old Friendly Couple from the airport. The screen dissolves into a backdrop of Hollywood where images of a happy Betty and Rita (in blonde wig) are overlaid. Back at the nightclub, a woman whispers, "Silencio."

Mulholland Drive – The Argument

They key question is simple: Is there a worthwhile argument being presented in a worthwhile way in *Mulholland Drive*? If none can be detected even after close study, the film represents an awkward exception to the thesis. If a non-edifying argument is present, or an edifying argument presented in a manipulative way or reliant on the compensations, then the film will be a failure by the definition of the thesis but may still be consistent with it; such a failure may be a reason why the film is admired by critics and audiences, but not mass audiences. Yet if *Mulholland Drive* does, despite popular perception, present a meaningful conclusion using ethical cinematic argumentation methodology, then it becomes not a counter-example but an exemplar of the thesis – and in this section the study will argue that this is indeed the case.

Using the same analytical apparatus to detect and justify an argument as used with *Toy Story 3, Mulholland Drive* may have a significantly more nuanced argument than the Pixar film, but it is consistent, comprehendible and worthwhile nonetheless. It can be stated in a way that maintains Lynch's mysterian worldview, that: *even though there is enrichment, humour and validity in the search for meaning, human memory, identity and consciousness are of such complexity that only a surface subjective level of understanding of who we are can be comprehended.*

This somewhat sceptical conclusion, and even the *attempt* to find a conclusion, certainly goes against the grain of those who typically embrace and revere Lynch's work, but could go some way to explain why *Mulholland Drive* in particular has grown in reputation to become a key part of his canon as opposed to other works that have been ill-received or become more marginalized over time.

So, again, to effectively defend the thesis, the analysis has to establish:

(a) that this is the correct conclusion.
(b) that this conclusion is worthwhile.
(c) how precisely the film constructs a compelling argument using cinematic tools; and
(d) how the film does this in a worthwhile way that does not rely on reasonable manipulation or reliance on the compensations.

Obviously, for a practitioner such as David Lynch proving (a) is not straightforward, especially as he is actively *discouraged* from attempting any transparency, both by audiences and critics (as outlined below), who constantly cite reticence to even attempt to unravel or articulate any meaning behind his screen works. Unlike *Toy Story 3*, where there is a reliable objective perspective, and great clarity given to every moment-to-moment cause-and-effect event sequence, *Mulholland Drive* does not prioritize transparency of storytelling. Therefore, the hermeneutic exercise has two levels: before any argument can be demonstrated, it must first be clarified what precisely the audience is seeing.

Most of the discourse around *Mulholland Drive* is not about the meaning of the film overall, but of the meaning of the events that have taken place in the narrative. There are essentially two schools of thought, the first most dominant interpretation is expounded by academics and critics alike typified by McGowan (2004, 2015) and Thomas (2006), who all believe it to be quite clearly a film of two halves. In *Subjective Realist Cinema: From Expressionism to Inception* (2014), Matthew Campora offers an explanation of the film that "is drawn from a growing consensus of commentators who view the film's first movement (and all its various strands) as a dream and its second as a waking frame that provides clues to making sense of the dream," (Campora, 2014, p. 69). Tom Charity, a film critic from *Time Out*, says, "For me the first half is the dream of a failed starlet idealising herself as a talented ingénue with a beautiful young woman who loves her. Then, about two-thirds of the way through, she wakes up and is faced with reality: she is a failed actress who has been dumped by her lover and is working as a waitress," (Charity, in Lewis, 2002). Belgian film director Jaco Van Dormael is quite explicit. "The film was crystal clear to me, because of its very bold time structure. Two-thirds of the film is but a dream," (Dormael, 2010, 1 minute, 8 seconds).

The second, minority school of thought is one championed more commonly by critics than academics and is epitomized by figures such as Stanley Kauffman and the BBC's Jane Douglas. Douglas defers all judgement as to meaning, "I'm not a subscriber to the theory that the first half of the film is a dream and the second half reality because I think it's too easy… I

do believe that in some ways it is better to just watch it without constantly trying to work out what it means," (Douglas, in Lewis, 2002). Kauffman claims that "sense is not the point: the responses are the point," (Kauffman, 2001). As mentioned earlier, such opinions and theories might be a minority view when it comes to interpreting *Mulholland Drive* specifically, but do expose the base-state uniform reaction to Lynch's work, which is a general reticence to deconstruct. This is worthy of note and will be re-examined at the end of this chapter with specific reference to *Mulholland Drive*.

The dominant 'Betty's Dream' understanding of the narrative is clearly the most justified. Although there is momentary confusion once the blue box has been opened and we are in the second reality where Betty is Diane, once the film ends it is a straightforward process to reinterpret and reassemble the previous scenes into a consistent, meaningful narrative. The opening of the jive dancing dissolving into a moaning figure under the bed sheets becomes a conventional framing device when taken with the interpretation of Betty as Diane's fantasy self. It is also a view that takes the Ockham's Razor approach: other interpretations are of course possible, but rely on far wider and less justifiable logical leaps.

Now that there is a solid basis on which to deconstruct the argument, *(a) that the above is the correct conclusion*, and *(c) precisely how the film constructs a compelling argument using cinematic tools* can be addressed. Why is the conclusion that (to paraphrase) 'true meaning in life is not comprehendible but worth exploring' the most credible interpretation? The primary recourse is to the film itself and to apply McKee's method to find *Mulholland Drive's* ultimate meaning by seeing what is expressed through the action and aesthetic emotion (where emotion and meaning arrive together instead of separately) of the last act's climax. To re-cap, McKee's version of cinematic argumentation is the 'Controlling Idea', defined as Value plus Cause, where 'Value' is the central thematic concept which includes a positive or negative judgement. McKee also states that scene-by-scene "positive idea and counter idea argue back-and-forth until at climax one voice wins," and is revealed as the controlling idea (McKee, 1998, p. 119).

So, what is the action and aesthetic emotion of the last act's climax? The reveal that Betty is actually Diane, a failed (and dumped and humiliated) actress who is masturbating through a fever-dream of both her perfect life and her demons, and who then commits suicide. Diane seems to learn that *she is a bad actress, that she will never be as successful or talented as Camilla, that she is a victim and that life is not worth living* before killing herself**.** This would indicate quite another conclusion and argument, along the lines of the more prosaic *'Love can destroy you if you let it define you' or 'Jealousy can destroy you if you let it define*

you', 'Hollywood can destroy you if you let it define you', or the more obviously Lynch-like *'Dreams can kill you if you let them define you'*.

Although, in defence of the latter, and with recourse to identifying the core thematic idea by seeing what is being tested in most scenes, there is certainly a recurrence of dream references and sleep iconography in the film (beds, the idea of Hollywood being the city of dreams – and the fact a tag-line for the film was 'A love story in the City of Dreams'). However, this particular McKee approach fails when it comes to *Mulholland* Drive, as the aesthetic emotion of the last act's climax does not relate to theme. This is one reason why the argument of the film can feel elusive, as it is not tethered completely to the main character's direct experience.

A method of assessing the key thematic element of an argument by observing what idea is being consistently tested on a scene-by-scene basis by the film is more effective here. So, what is being tested? On a casual viewing, there seem to be many abstract concepts touched upon at various times during the narrative: love, sex, jealousy, randomness, romance, fame, talent, self-respect, desire, fantasy, ambition, optimism, feminism, capitalism, corruption, nostalgia, dreams, nightmares, identity and violence to name but a few. These can all fit under a vague conception of the nature of 'Hollywood itself', and the setting provides opportunity for satire that could also indicate meaning. It is also unsurprising that a high number of themes are embedded in the work, given the television-pilot origins of the project. However, these are all sub-thematic concepts that complement the main thesis of the film, as although they have thematic points to make, they do not contradict the main thematic idea, and as they represent more of an unfinished flow of ideas and points-of-view, none of them the basis for a fully developed argument. The only thematic idea that is being consistently tested throughout the film is Lynch's mysterian point of view.

Various conceptions and manifestations of mystery are present in every frame of the film, from the most surface level of Betty and Rita trying to solve the mystery of Rita's past, but broadening out as the film reveals its design to mysteries of perception, identity and reality. To use McKee's 'Controlling Idea' paradigm, the 'Value' must be mystery, the positive idea being that *all mysteries can be solved*, the negative counter-idea that *some mysteries are unsolvable*, a common push-and-pull battle naturally present in almost any mystery narrative. In terms of genre, *Mulholland Drive* is set up as a neo-noir mystery with all the necessary tropes and signifiers (femme fatale, amnesia, organized crime, glamorous lives with seedy underbellies), where the initial set-up is deliberately conventional: the two main characters attempt to solve a mystery, therefore setting up mystery as a central concept with

both the characters and the audience on the lookout for clues. However, unlike *Toy Story 3*, there are no big clear discussions of these thematic ideas, with the audience expected to do more cognitive work to discern thematic point-of-view.

To now consider *(c) how precisely the film constructs a compelling argument using cinematic tools,* the issue of the both the events and argument of the film being opaque to sections of the audience is not due to the absence of a worthwhile argument being made in a worthwhile way, but the fact that the film uses unconventional cinematic methodology to make the argument.

To return to the design of the film, as much as the initial appearance is as of a neo-noir film, the film functions as an almost perfect exemplar of the 'Mind-Game Film,' (Elsaesser, 2009), briefly discussed in Chapter 6.

The mind-game film is often referred to as a 'puzzle' film (Panek, 2006) and Elsaesser defines it as comprising films that are 'playing games' with either the characters or the audience (or both), with the latter due to certain crucial information being withheld or ambiguously presented (Elsaesser, 2009, p. 14). Elsaesser puts *Mulholland Drive* into this category and notes that some mind-game films "put the emphasis on "mind", featuring characters with unstable mental conditions where perception of reality is a central concern (Elsaesser, 2009, p. 14). Further, Elsaesser notes various common themes of the mind-game film to be "the nature of consciousness and memory," and that "they address not just the usual (genre) issues… but also epistemological problems (how do we know what we know) and ontological doubts (about other worlds, other minds) that are in the mainstream of the kinds of philosophical inquiry focused on human consciousness, the mind and brain," (Elsaesser, 2009, p. 15).

He also notes that an overriding common feature of mind-game films is that they "delight in disorienting or misleading spectators," and that "spectators on the whole do not mind being "played with": on the contrary, they rise to the challenge," (Elsaesser, 2009, p. 15). Elsaesser identifies as a potential root cause of the rise of the mind-game film across all national cinemas, and its increasing prevalence as a storytelling form, the need for the modern mainstream narrative feature film to exist on a variety of platforms that make them constantly accessible. This provides both an incentive and a need for practitioners to create work that can sustain multiple viewings, lest the work be deemed basic or simplistic. Typical mind-game narration revolves around "unreliable narrators, the multiple time-lines, unusual point of view structures, unmarked flashbacks, problems in focalization and perspectivism, unexpected causal reversals and narrative loops," and typical mind-game central characters suffer from

some kind of psychopathology such as amnesia to highlight "conundrums about the relation of body, brain and consciousness that challenge concepts of "identity"", (Elsaesser, 2009, p. 18) all elements of which are present in *Mulholland Drive.*

In this way, in the period since its release, the storytelling structure of *Mulholland Drive* has become increasingly conventional, which may account for the increasing esteem in which the film is held. But how precisely does this 'puzzle' narrative structure relate to the forming of the argument? The answer is that *Mulholland Drive* argues unconventionally as it is the *structure itself* that carries most of the weight of the argument – the presentation of the argument itself supports the conclusion. This is filled in and made more nuanced by the characters and their interactions (the plot is a mystery, amnesia and identity are key themes), but the shape of the argument dominates the content, quite efficiently organizing the plethora of thematic ideas into the category of sub-thematics. Given the conclusion, that "*even though there is joy, humour and validity in the search for meaning, human memory, identity and consciousness are of such complexity that only a surface subjective level of understanding of who we are can be comprehended"*, it is clear that the puzzle structure is a very efficient form of argument presentation. Film theorist David Roche believes that Lynch's films are detective stories only in the sense that they turn the audience into detectives in order to understand the narrative. Roche believes that *Mulholland Drive* is a mystery film constructed wholly "by the spectator-detective's desire to make sense" of it (Roche, 2004). It should also be noted that in laying out the logic of the argument, *Mulholland Drive* uses only action to communicate both the thematic question and answer. (By comparison *Toy Story 3* lays out the precise thematic question in dialogue and answers it (and hence presents the conclusion to the argument) in thematic action.) This certainly makes both thematic question and answer less explicit in *Mulholland Drive* but, as discussed, the argument is strengthened as a consequence. To have the audience to go to the significant cognitive effort to assemble the puzzle, only for more mystery to remain is one way to attempt the viewers to *feel* the conclusion as well as comprehend it.

In this way, *Mulholland Drive* adheres quite strictly to Aristotle's theory of argumentation. Ethos and logos are both are applied conventionally – David Lynch has considerable credibility as an artist and the argument is logical, if requiring some assembly, as detailed above. However, when it comes to the intrinsic cinematic strength of pathos, the film takes an unusual argumentative approach. Pathos in filmic storytelling is ordinarily used to invoke emotions embedded in the narrative, rather than senses generated through spectatorship. However, the story structure, philosophical themes and performance style of

Mulholland Drive make meaningful emotional engagement and/or identification problematic, and instead the film prioritizes the engagement (deliberate or otherwise) of the senses rather than the emotions.

Let us take the example of the unreliable narrator, common not just to mind-game films, but a staple of German Expressionism, itself the main inspiration for the 'noir' genre. The revelation that Betty is not who she first seemed comes a full thirty minutes before the close of the film. At this point, over and above the cognitive work of assessing this new identity and reality for stability and permanency, the audience now has to learn about and potentially care for this new iteration of the character; what is gained in terms of narrative impact is lost in terms of emotional connection. Audiences may like, or even *prefer*, this new Betty/Diane, but they had built up a relationship with the previous incarnation that may (or may not) have to be jettisoned. So there is not only a new character to contend with, attention is also split. In fact, it should be noted that the use of this technique combined with the psychopathologies of paranoia and amnesia, and the motif of the doppelganger, push *Mulholland Drive* away from being just a 'noir' (in the sense that it is a crime story with visual and thematic roots in German Expressionism), towards a film solidly in the tradition of German Expressionist filmmaking. Essentially the film could be viewed as an homage to *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (Campora, 2014, p. 68), which covered much of the same ground on the nature of identity and reality (complete with unreliable narrator and twist/reversal ending).

It is also important to note that Lynch's cinematic storytelling method may be unconventional in terms of classic Hollywood cinema, but very conventional in its obedience to the traditions of Slavic storytelling imparted to him during his student years. One of Frank Daniel's exercises included writing three versions of the same scene: a *poetic* version, a *comedic* version and a *tragic* version, with a final version having to include all three elements. The goal was to engage the senses of the audience, not their intellect (Dormael, 2010, 17 minutes, 54 seconds).

However, any loss of emotional connection with Betty may not represent as significant an issue as it would be in a more conventionally told narrative version of the argument, such as *Shutter Island* (Scorsese, 2010). The performance style – up to the point of revelation – in *Mulholland Drive* does not encourage empathy. Essentially, Lynch uses a heightened Brechtian level of performance, an extreme style that goes against the grain of realism (Watts, 2017). It is Brechtian in that it constantly reminds us that we are watching a construction rather than reality. Only when Betty is revealed as Diane does the performance

style change to something more akin to conventional screen realism, but again, there is limited time in which to connect with the character. In a conventionally-told film, the audience would usually care about the main character as their journey embodies the argument. If this does not emotionally engage us, the argument is weakened or lost altogether.

In *Mulholland Drive*, Lynch's argument-building does not rely on pathos-as-emotion, but pathos-as-sensuous (in the Miltonian, non-sexual, sense (Fallon, 2014)) by manipulation of mise-en-scene (Jousse, 2010, 3 minutes, 48 seconds). This brings the analysis to *(d) that the construction of the argument is done in a worthwhile way that does not rely on unreasonable manipulation or reliance on the compensations*. Whereas there does not appear to be any unreasonable manipulation present (as *Mulholland Drive* neither relies on emotion or sentimentality, nor attempts to falsely present real-world facts to create its argument), a case could be made for sensation-as-compensation. However, this case would have to rely on the everyday interpretation of the term, as in this context sensation-as compensation is defined *by the use of extreme sensation to distract from film-as-argument flaws,* and as much as *Mulholland Drive* attempts to evoke unsettling sensations, these are clearly at the service of the story and not extreme enough to function as compensation. It is relevant to note, however, that although *Mulholland Drive* does not use sensation as compensation as defined by this thesis, it is often *cited as a compensation* by other practitioners, critics and audiences, who either cannot or refuse to read or accept the argument the film is making. French Director Guillame Nicloux (*Valley of Love*, 2015) comments that "What I like in films is to be very much disturbed and lost, like when you're looking at a painting you don't understand", (Nicloux, 2010, 1 minute, 48 seconds) screenwriter and noted Lynch fan Michael Souhaite (Roxane, 2019) comments that, "Lynch really works on creating a feeling. He keeps titillating the audience with lots of sounds, which put them into a trance, a dreamlike state," (Souhaite, 2010, 9 minutes, 36 seconds) and Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* magazine sums up the position well in his comments that "*Mulholland Drive* is all of a dark, dazzling piece, and lapses in clarity seem a small price to pay for breathtaking images like these," (Travers, 2001).

The only other relevant compensations are those of *(5) Author, (6) Visual Pleasure* and *(11) Puzzle-solving.* With regards to the latter, objections can certainly be raised towards the film with regards the comprehension of the argument and the cognitive demands placed on the audience, but the argument is sincerely made – as the study has noted, the puzzle form being a justifiably efficient choice (with recourse to cinematic tradition) to both structure and become the evidence for the argument. Puzzle films essentially have only three basic

conclusions (that can then be further nuanced): *everything* is solvable; *nothing* is solvable; or *some things* are solvable. *Mulholland Drive* uses the mosaic-like structure to argue the latter, with the occasional story strands left undeveloped and the non-gratuitous engagement of the senses indicating further layers of meaning integral to this conclusion.

With regard to *(5) Author*, Lynch as an artist carries considerable credibility. However, this would only function if the film itself failed to function meaningfully as argument, and as the study has examined, that is not the case with *Mulholland Drive*, a cognitively challenging but nonetheless coherent narrative.

Regarding *(6) Visual Pleasure,* scopophilia, the concept of obtaining pleasure from looking, is a core element of the cinematic experience – so visual-pleasure-as-compensation is purely predicated on emphasis. As the study has noted, as much as the images (and sounds) Lynch creates in *Mulholland Drive* are lauded, and like the everyday use of the concept of sensation, often cited as compensations by viewers refusing or unable to perform the cognitive work required to interpret the story coherently, there is no *over-emphasis* on them separate from the logical and effective construction of the argument; that this argument is functional also negates any function of the images as compensation.

Finally, there is the question of *(b) that the conclusion is worthwhile*. To recap this conclusion it is that: *Even though there is enrichment, humour and validity in the search for meaning, human memory, identity and consciousness are of such complexity that only a surface subjective level of understanding of who we are can be comprehended.* In terms of an edifying conclusion within Western society, it is uncommon but certainly not unique in mainstream cinema and literature, the unknowable-ness of consciousness a relatively familiar science-fiction preoccupation, especially those stories involving robotics, androids or cyborgs (such as those written by Isaac Asimov). It is reminiscent of, but much more optimistic than Douglas Adams' answer to 'the meaning of life, the universe and everything': 'forty-two', (*The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy,* 1979). The idea that such a complex question can have such a simple answer is absurd in the extreme. But worthwhile or edifying does not mean unique. A worthwhile conclusion is largely dependent on social and societal context, and can be quite familiar if its restating has value at that historical time and place. One example of this is the winner of the American Academy Award for Best Picture, *Green Book* (Farrelly, 2018), a perhaps over-simple tale of the *'we're all just people, we can get along if we just tried to understand each other'* variety. A very familiar conclusion to be sure, but one that could well have value in increasingly divisive times. The conclusion of *Mulholland Drive* is far from that of *Green Book*, as Jaco Van Dormael states: "I think that Lynch's work contributes to the

fight against simplification, against a trend of unambiguous movies, which provide answers the way television news does. His work speaks to a different kind of awareness, a different perception, of what we believe to be reality, without knowing what it is. Is it what we perceive through our eyes and ears, or something else?" (Dormael, 2010, 26 minutes, 1 second).

8.3 Conclusion

Mulholland Drive represents a strong putative counter-example to the thesis of the internal good of mainstream narrative feature film being to move an audience to a worthwhile conclusion in a worthwhile way. In direct counterpoint to *Toy Story 3* (yet still within the bounds of a mainstream narrative feature film 'deemed releasable'), it is atypically developed and narratively obscure, and at face value seems to be a failure as defined by the thesis. But, crucially, it is also a film lauded by audiences, critics and other practitioners alike. In fact, a very common position on the film, as with most of David Lynch's work, is to resist analysis, of either story or meaning.

Mulholland Drive certainly has, by mainstream multiplex narrative standards, told its story by unorthodox means, but once unpacked this story is coherent, consistent and logical with all cinematic elements at the service of delivering a compelling argument to support the conclusion that '*Even though there is enrichment, humour and validity in the search for meaning, human memory, identity and consciousness are of such complexity that only a surface subjective level of understanding of who we are can be comprehended'.* The argument could be construed as weaker if it were difficult for the viewer to interpret, but it is still present nonetheless and potentially the cognitive work required to grasp it could equally be construed as a strengthening of the argument: the effort aligns the viewer with the characters.

The evidence has been laid out above, but there is still one problematic factor to discuss. Those who laud *Mulholland Drive* also tend to resist any significant analysis to find meaning. How does this reconcile with the thesis? *How can the internal good of the practice be to move people to a worthwhile conclusion in a worthwhile way, if some audiences regard any meaning as unimportant, yet enjoy mainstream cinema?*

The response is two-fold: the 'easy' response is to dismiss such an audience as the exception that proves the rule. Even Lynch's most successful cinematic works are seen by relatively modest audiences, not all of which wish to avoid analysis. This would mean that the meaning-averse audience is an outlier; particularly small and not representative of typical

mainstream audiences. In purely numerical terms – David Lynch has never made a film that had grossed more than $31 million US Dollars in American cinemas (*Dune*, 1984), with *Mulholland Drive* making $7.2 million compared to independent comedy *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (Zwick, 2002) drawing in $242 million (Boxofficemojo) – this is a valid position.

However, a more robust response is the claim that, just in the same way that the internal good of the practice of film-as-meaningful-argument is incognizant to most practitioners, the meaning-averse audience is equally incognizant in recognizing which elements of the film have triggered their on-going engagement with it. The film is Lynch's most well-received cinematic work (both at the time and reflectively) and this could be due to the fact that it is Lynch's most successful attempt at layering his narrative, deliberately or not, to suit different levels of engagement and, thus, different audiences.

Mulholland Drive, clearly influenced by Lynch's favourite films (Fox, 2019) *Sunset Boulevard* (Wilder, 1950) and *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, 1939), has struck a Schrödinger's Cat-like perfect balance of being both a solvable and unsolvable mystery simultaneously; it is at once possible to find an interpretation – yet with some (but not equal) validity, due to either extraneous narrative elements or a lack of interest in doing the cognitive work, also possible to swallow whole the Lynchian mysterian standpoint. However, the incognizant element for the engagement of the meaning-averse audience is the presence of a solvable 'surface' mystery (even if not consciously desired by this audience) that in this case allows for coherent argument.

One way to test this theory is to consider another film from David Lynch, one that shares almost identical narrative and structural elements to *Mulholland Drive* but is resolutely insoluble. That film is *Inland Empire* (2006). It shares with *Mulholland Drive* the Hollywood setting, the puzzle-like structure, the dream/nightmare-like atmosphere, the focus on sensation over emotion, the *Wizard of Oz/Sunset Boulevard* homages and the central character attempting to solve a mystery, as well as featuring regular Lynch actors Laura Dern, Harry Dean Stanton and *Mulholland Drive* alumni Justin Theroux, Laura Harring and Naomi Watts. Most of the narrative is concerned with an actress Nikki Grace (Laura Dern) starring in a film but becoming confused about what is real and what is fiction. Yet, unlike *Mulholland Drive*, *Inland Empire* presents no key, metaphorical or otherwise, to help decode the events depicted on screen. If the audiences, critics and practitioners that champion the ability of Lynch's work to not require analysis or even speculation as to the meaning of physical on-screen events other than a subconscious engagement with the feel and tone of the work, then there should be the genuine expectation that *Inland Empire* would be equally well received.

Yet Inland Empire became Lynch's least successful film to date, so much so that one critic thought the film resembled "the work of an old genius with Alzheimers," (Brooks, in Leigh, 2007). Whereas *Mulholland Drive* topped the aforementioned 'Best Films of the Twentieth Century' critics list, *Inland Empire* does not appear and made only 11% of the previous film's US theatrical gross (Boxofficemojo).

In fact, *Inland Empire* is a good example of a film that truly fails by the terms of this thesis. It is all sensation and mystery and puzzle. But, despite what various sectors of the viewing audience might hope for, it is untethered to the internal good of the practice and the film is unable to engage. Momentary sensation may happen, but with no argument to structure the narrative, sustained engagement does not. The conclusion may be worthwhile, but the argument for it is not made in a worthwhile way; in fact, the mode of storytelling almost completely obscures it. Often quotidian elements are used to help anchor the audience, but here those elements are missing.

This may indicate a loss – momentary or otherwise – of the media-specific motivational virtue of creative generosity. As with Terrence Malick, a practitioner who concentrates on unpopular topics that will limit their audience is not ungenerous if they are trying to genuinely attempting to communicate with that audience. However, placed in the context of Lynch's oeuvre (as of 2020, *Inland Empire* represents his final feature film), it does suggest an increase of self-indulgence; *Inland Empire* could be considered to be Lynch's *Knight of Cups* (Malick, 2015), a film targeted not just for audiences at the top of the 'Pixar' pyramid, but purely at Lynch himself.

It is worth revisiting the fear of didacticism here, as it seems that this is what unites general audiences, critics, practitioners and mentors. In terms of Lynch specifically, one possible explanation for the view that his films can appear to work independently of meaning is that incoherence and obfuscation is often preferred over any hint of pedagogy.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion

9.1 Conclusion

As the study comes to a close, it is worth reiterating what the thesis is not. It is not a general theory of story or narrative, nor a universalisable conception of art. The thesis is not applicable to any other screen form and is not concerned with what mainstream narrative films are in the ontological sense, nor what they could or should be doing. The new hermeneutic developed based on the notion of film-as-argument and demonstrated in the case studies is not offered as a new theory of spectatorship, but as an illustration of film-as-argument in action and a diagnostic for practitioners to assess how argument manifests in their work.

The study had a singular aim. To offer a new, teleological understanding of the social practice of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking from conception to delivery that will positively impact professional application. It defended the thesis that:

a) The tradition and current practice of making mainstream narrative feature films is based on the 'Internal Goods' of the practice.
b) The 'Internal Goods' are singular, namely to move people in a worthwhile way to a conclusion that is worth having.
c) Most practitioners do not conceptualize mainstream narrative feature films in this way, which makes the tradition an incognizant practice.

The study used the teleological account of social practice rather than the more traditional sociological or cultural understanding, and justified why mainstream narrative feature film should be considered a social practice in this sense, in terms of its ends. The teleological account of social practice concept considers that human virtues are necessary for a practitioner to excel at a specific practice but do not define what it means to excel at that practice, and as such the concept of internal goods are deemed necessary to describe these ends. The thesis offered an account not just of these internal goods of the practice as noted

above, but those virtues necessary but not sufficient to excel, those of courage, honesty, justice, curiosity, creative compassion and creative generosity.

Taking a critical hermeneutic approach, the study constructed its argument by:

(a) Recourse to dominant thought in the areas of film-philosophy and professional practice.
(b) Comparison of the central thesis to other competing and more prevalent notions of the internal goods.
(c) Providing an account that allows for the high failure rate (as defined by the thesis) of completed mainstream narrative feature films.
(d) Analysis of completed mainstream narrative feature films, including a strong counter-example.

The investigation into academic thinking with regard to the ability of film to argue, noted that the current orthodoxy is that mainstream narrative feature film can meaningfully argue. Analysis of the dominant theories of professional screenwriting and directing practice revealed a significant gap in the doxy: that of film-as-argument. Although the professional literature indicates a reticence to *explicitly* explore this area, there are consistent *implicit* references throughout.

In order to test the validity of the thesis, the study evaluated and critiqued other more dominant yet uninterrogated conceptions of the internal goods of the practice. These other accounts were defined, investigated and the evidence to support their primacy was found to be insufficient, although it was noted that they do have the effect of obscuring the more valid internal good of film-as-worthwhile-argument, making the practice incognizant and resulting in many flawed creations.

The magnitude of these flawed creations required an account of how an industry survives despite most of the outputs not meeting the standard of the practice. The Cinema of Compensation was new conceptual work offered that provided an explanation of how various creative elements (both textual and contextual) can be applied to compensate for flawed argument.

Finally, the case for film-as-worthwhile-argument was made with recourse to two case studies: an exemplar and a counter-example. Both case studies established that the thesis is sound and can apply to any mainstream narrative feature film, however seemingly problematic.

Whilst impossible to prove definitively, the thesis represents a significant account that should be taken seriously as *extensive evidence exists to support this conception, over and above the other accounts of the practice.* As the above demonstrates, this evidence has been taken from industry and non-industry sources, from academics, critics, professional creative mentors and the practitioners themselves (the latter, in McIntyre's view (1981, pp. 188-189), the only source truly qualified to assess and articulate the internal goods of their practice).

Due to the incognizant nature of these internal goods, the evidence to support the account of film-as-worthwhile-argument is necessarily hermeneutic in nature. Perhaps the most critical evidence examined comes from the professional 'gurus' that have influenced successive generations of practitioners, industry executives and educators, and their almost pathological avoidance of conceptualizing the internal goods of the practice as worthwhile argument construction, instead obscuring the idea under such inconsistent, imprecise and awkward euphemistic terms such as "subject" (Field, 2005, p. 32), "idea", (Seger, 1994, p. 120) or "living philosophy," (McKee, 1998, p. 115) – or avoiding it altogether. Yet the 'shape' as film-as-worthwhile argument is ubiquitous, be it in the lyrics to the opening sequence of the 2015 American Academy Award ceremony, "Sometimes when they hit, you must admit, they sometimes change your view of it in ways both big and small," (*Neil Patrick Harris' Opening Number*, 2015, 6 minutes, 52 seconds) to critics assessing the argument instead of the film (Chang, Debruge, Foundas, 2013).

9.2 Implications of findings

The study is significant for a variety of reasons. First, whilst film as a social practice has been considered in the sociological and cultural sense (Turner, 1988) this study is the first account to define it in a teleological sense. More significantly, although film's ability to function as argument is not a new concept in academic circles, the idea of it being definitive of the practice represents a wholly original notion. The thesis defended, that of film-as-worthwhile-argument is not how the practice is currently conceptualized either within the academy (even with a creative practice focus), or the mainstream narrative feature film industry – essentially no-one is conceiving of the practice in this way – which means the study represents a significant addition to knowledge and the potential for academic and industry impact.

This potential impact may not be welcome, especially amongst practitioners. As was noted in the introduction, if proven to a satisfactory degree, the thesis could be regarded as highly contentious. It is without prejudice, but the thesis makes the claim that practitioners

have either misunderstood and/or are largely unaware of essential the nature of their practice. This claim is likely to experience some resistance, no matter how well-researched and articulated the claim. So in order to convince a potentially reluctant industry, it is imperative to explore the possible benefits of being thus "woke"?

The answer is that it is not enough to simply have the *virtues* of the filmmaker, as the very concept of internal goods demonstrate that these are no guarantee of excellence in any given social practice. A practitioner can be brave, honest, curious, creatively compassionate and generous – yet still fail. If practitioners accept the conceptualization of the internal goods of the practice as 'worthwhile argument construction', a higher percentage of film stories will connect with audiences by communicating their arguments effectively using the various cinematic tools and thus avoiding becoming pointless or confused on the one hand, or ruthlessly didactic on the other.

The speculation outlined in Chapter 5 that the 'gurus' have avoided this account of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking due to a fear of didactic screenplays and films dominating the industry represents a valid, if somewhat myopic, point of view. If professional practice were to consciously adopt the conception of filmmaking's internal good set out in this thesis, there would certainly be a period of readjustment in which inexperienced practitioners create obvious and didactic work, but this is a question of craft, talent and skill, not of the practice itself. The ongoing benefit to the practice of cognizance is significant. How can you do your best work when you are unaware of the fundamental nature of your own practice? Unaware practitioners spend resources in the wrong areas, and successes are overly dependent upon luck.

A more significant danger, perhaps, is to the industry as a whole. The speculation, as outlined in Chapter 4, that institutions are quite happy to dismiss their practice as 'just entertainment' to downplay its influence for fear of regulation or litigation is a legitimate concern. Openly admitting that not just a primary aspect, but a *driving force* of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking is to attempt to influence may not be welcome by all concerned, but fortunately for the industry the influence of media on human behaviour is unlikely to ever be definitively qualified or quantified, and thus does not represent a substantial basis to resist the findings of the study.

9.3 Suggestions for Further Research

The scope of the research has been necessarily focused on proving that the current tradition and practice of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking is to move the audience to a worthwhile conclusion in a worthwhile way. It has been qualitative and interpretative in nature and has not examined precisely *what* arguments are being made to see if there are any tendencies, and if any trends can be found, if there is an explanation for those trends.

This approach belongs in the realm of scholarship sometimes referred to as 'literary Darwinism', research into the evolution of narratives: why some stories survive, some thrive, and others diminish. Anthropologist Daniel Smith has tracked specific narratives and found evidence to support their significant influence on human behaviour (2017). Such research would extend the scope of this study by providing hard data to illustrate any potentially dominant arguments told and re-told in a cinematic context, and whether any behavioural influence can attributed to them, as Green and Brock's (2000) research suggests.

All social practice evolves and transforms over time. As stated above, this study has been an interpretation, a description of the traditions and internal good of the social practice of mainstream narrative feature filmmaking at this precise moment in time. The film, and screen industries in general, are currently in a period of great flux. Large institutional disruptors are continuing to enter the practice such as Netflix, Amazon and Apple, changing not just how mainstream narrative feature films are financed and made, but also how they are seen. It would be both fascinating and propitious to repeat the study in five or ten years to assess if new traditions and internal goods have emerged.

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Knives Out 2019, motion picture, Lionsgate, USA. Produced by Rian Johnson and Ram Bergman, written and directed by Rian Johnson.

Knocked Up 2007, motion picture, Universal Pictures, USA. Produced by Judd Apatow et al., written and directed by Judd Apatow.

Koyaanisqatsi 1982, motion picture, American Zoetrope, USA. Produced by Godfrey Reggio, written by Godfrey Reggio et al, directed by Godfrey Reggio.

L.A. Confidential 1997, motion picture, Warner Brothers Pictures, USA. Produced by Arnon Milchan et al., written by Brian Helgeland and Curtis Hanson, directed by Curtis Hanson.

Ladri di Biciclette, motion picture, Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche, Italy. Produced by Ercole Graziadei et al., written by Vittorio de Sica et al., directed by Vittorio de Sica.

Lady Chatterley 2006, motion picture, Ad Vitam Distribution, France. Produced by Gilles Sandoz, written by Roger Bohbot and Pascale Ferran, directed by Pascale Ferran.

The Larry Sanders Show 1992-1998, television program, Sony Pictures Television, USA. Produced by Gary Shandling et al., written by Gary Shandling et al., directed by Gary Shandling et al.

The Last Laugh 1924, motion picture, UFA, Germany. Produced by Erich Pommer, written by Carl Mayer, directed by F. W. Murnau.

The Last Samuari 2003, motion picture, Warner Brothers Pictures, USA. Produced by Tom Cruise et al., written by John Logan et al., directed by Edward Zwick.

Lethal Weapon 1987, motion picture, Warner Brothers, USA. Produced by Richard Donner and Joel Silver, written by Shane Black, directed by Richard Donner.

The Lion King 2019, motion picture, Walt Disney Studios, USA. Produced by Jon Favreau et al., written by Jeff Nathanson, directed by Jon Favreau.

Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels 1998, motion picture, Polygram Filmed Entertainment, UK. Produced by Matthew Vaughn, written and directed by Guy Ritchie.

The Lone Ranger 2013, motion picture, Walt Disney Pictures, USA. Produced by Jerry Bruckheimer and Gore Verbinski, written by Justin Haythe et al., directed by Gore Verbinski.

Lost Highway 1997, motion picture, October Films, USA. Produced by Mary Sweeney et al., written by David Lynch and Barry Gifford, directed by David Lynch.

The Machinist 2004, motion picture, Paramount Classics, USA. Produced by Carlos Fernandez, written by Scott Kosar, directed by Brad Anderson.

Mama Mia 2008, motion picture, Universal Pictures, USA. Produced by Judy Craymer and Gary Goetzman, written by Catherine Johnson, directed by Phyllida Lloyd.

Masquerade 1965, motion picture, United Artists, USA. Produced by Michael Relph, written by William Goldman and Michael Relph, directed by Basil Dearden.

The Matrix 1999, motion picture, Warner Brothers, USA. Produced by Joel Silver, written and directed by The Wachowskis.

Mean Streets 1973, motion picture, Warner Brothers, USA. Produced by Jonathan T. Taplin, written by Martin Scorsese and Mardik Martin, directed by Martin Scorsese.

Memento 2000, motion picture, Summit Entertainment, USA. Produced by Suzanne Todd and Jennifer Todd, written and directed by Christopher Nolan.

Midnight Express 1978, motion picture, Columbia Pictures, USA. Produced by Alan Marshall and David Puttnam, written by Oliver Stone, directed by Alan Parker.

Modern Times 1936, motion picture, United Artists, USA. Produced, written and directed by Charlie Chaplin.

Moonlight 2016, motion picture, A24, USA. Produced by Adele Romanski et al., written and directed by Barry Jenkins.

mother! 2017, motion picture, Paramount Pictures, USA. Produced by Scott Franklin and Ari Handel, written and directed by Darren Aronofsky.

Mulholland Drive 2001, motion picture, Universal Pictures, USA. Produced by Mary Sweeney et al., written and directed by David Lynch.

Murder on the Orient Express 1974 motion picture, Paramount Pictures, USA. Produced by John Brabourne and Richard Goodwin, written by Paul Dehn, directed by Sidney Lumet.

Murder on the Orient Express 2017, motion picture, Twentieth Century Fox, USA. Produced by Ridley Scott et al., written by Michael Green, directed by Kenneth Branagh.

My Big Fat Greek Wedding, motion picture, IFC Films, USA. Produced by Gary Goetzman et al., written by Nia Vardalos, directed by Joel Zwick.

The New World 2005, motion picture, New Line Cinema, USA. Produced by Sarah Green, written and directed by Terrence Malick.

O Brother, Where Art Thou? 2000, motion picture, Universal Pictures, USA. Produced by Ethan Coen, written by Ethan Coen and Joel Coen, directed by Joel Coen.

Ocean's 11 2001, motion picture, Warner Brothers Pictures, USA. Produced by Jerry Weintraub, written by Ted Griffin, directed by Steven Soderbergh.

Ocean's 12 2004, motion picture, Warner Brothers Pictures, USA. Produced by Jerry Weintraub, written by George Nolfi, directed by Steven Soderbergh.

An Officer and a Gentleman 1982, motion picture, Paramount Pictures, USA. Produced by Martin Elfand and Douglas Day Stewart, written by Douglas Day Stewart, directed by Taylor Hackford.

On the Air 1992, television program, ABC, USA. Produced by Deepak Nayar and Gregg Fienberg, written by David Lynch et al., directed by David Lynch et al.

Paper Moon 1973, motion picture, Paramount Pictures, USA. Produced by Frank Marshall and Peter Bogdanovich, written by Alvin Sargent, directed by Peter Bogdanovich.

Papillon 1973, motion picture, Allied Artists, USA. Produced by Robert Dorfmann et al., written by Dalton Trumbo and Lorenzo Semple Jr., directed by Franklin J, Schaffner.

Pearl Harbor 2001, motion picture, Touchstone Pictures, USA. Produced by Jerry Bruckheimer and Michael Bay, written by Randall Wallace, directed by Michael Bay.

Payback 1999, motion picture, Paramount Pictures, USA. Produced by Bruce Davey, written by Brian Helgeland and Terry Hayes, directed by Brian Helgeland.

Phantom Thread 2017, motion picture, Universal Pictures, USA. Produced by JoAnne Sellar et al., written and directed by Paul Thomas Anderson.

Planet of the Apes 2001, motion picture, 20th Century Fox, USA. Produced by Richard D. Zanuck, written by William Broyles Jr. et al., directed by Tim Burton.

Planet Terror 2007, motion picture, Dimension Films, USA. Produced by Robert Rodriguez et al., written and directed by Robert Rodriguez.

The Prestige 2006, motion picture, Warner Brothers Pictures, USA. Produced by Emma Thomas et al., written by Jonathan Nolan and Christopher Nolan, directed by Christopher Nolan.

Prêt-à-Porter, 1994, motion picture, Miramax Films, USA. Produced by Robert Altman and Scott Bushnell, written by Robert Altman and Barbara Shulgasser, directed by Robert Altman.

Pride and Prejudice 2005, motion picture, Working Title Films, UK. Produced by Tim Bevan et al., written by Deborah Moggach, directed by Joe Wright.

Psycho 1960, motion picture, Paramount Pictures, USA. Produced by Alfred Hitchcock, written by Joseph Stefano, directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

Pulp Fiction 1994, motion picture, Miramax Films, USA. Produced by Lawrence Bender, written and directed by Quentin Tarantino.

Raging Bull 1980, motion picture, United Artists, USA. Produced by Irwin Winkler and Robert Chartoff, written by Paul Schrader and Mardik Martin, directed by Martin Scorsese.

Raiders of the Lost Ark 1981, motion picture, Paramount Pictures, USA. Produced by Frank Marshall, written by Lawrence Kasdan, directed by Steven Spielberg.

Ready Player One 2018, motion picture, Warner Brothers Pictures, USA. Produced by Steven Spielberg et al., written by Zak Penn and Ernest Cline, directed by Steven Spielberg.

Rise of the Planet of the Apes 2011, motion picture, 20th Century Fox, USA. Produced by Peter Chernin et al., written by Rick Jaffa and Amanda Silver, directed by Rupert Wyatt.

Risky Business 1983, motion picture, Warner Brothers Pictures, USA. Produced by Jon Avnet and Steve Tisch, written and directed by Paul Brickman.

Robin Hood: Men in Tights 1993, motion picture, 20th Century Fox, USA. Produced by Mel Brooks, written by Mel Brooks et al., directed by Mel Brooks.

The Rock 1996, motion picture, Hollywood Pictures, USA. Produced by Don Simpson and Jerry Bruckheimer, written by David Weisberg et al., directed by Michael Bay.

Rocketman 2019, motion picture, Paramount Pictures, USA. Produced by David Furnish et al., written by Lee Hall, directed by Dexter Fletcher.

Rocky IV 1985, motion picture, United Artists/Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, USA. Produced by Robert Chartoff and Irwin Winkler, written and directed by Sylvester Stallone.

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story 2016, motion picture, Walt Disney Studios, USA. Produced by Kathleen Kennedy et al., written by Chris Weitz and Tony Gilroy, directed by Gareth Edwards.

Romance 1999, motion picture, Rezo Films, France. Produced by Jean-Francois Lepetit, written and directed by Catherine Breillat.

Room with a View 1985, motion picture, Film Four International, UK. Produced by Ismail Merchant, written by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, directed by James Ivory.

Roots 1977, television program, Warner Brothers Television, USA. Produced by Stan Margulies, written by Alex Haley et al., directed by Marvin J. Chomsky et al.

Roots 2016, television program, History Channel, USA. Produced by Alissa M. Kantrow et al., written by Alex Haley et al., directed by Phillip Noyce et al.

Roxane 2019, motion picture, Quad Films, France. Produced by Foucauld Barre and Nicolas Duval Adassovsky, written by Michael Souhaite, directed by Melanie Auffret.

San Andreas 2015, motion picture, Warner Brothers Pictures, USA. Produced by Beau Flynn, written by Carlton Cuse, directed by Brad Peyton.

Saving Private Ryan 1998, motion picture, Dreamworks Pictures, USA. Produced by Steven Spielberg et al., written by Robert Rodat, directed by Steven Spielberg.

Schindler's List 1993, motion picture, Universal Pictures, USA. Produced by Steven Spielberg et al., written by Steven Zaillian, directed by Steven Spielberg.

Scream 1996, motion picture, Dimension Films, USA. Produced by Cathy Konrad and Cary Woods, written by Kevin Williamson, directed by Wes Craven.

Serene Velocity, 1970, motion picture (short), Ernie Gehr, USA. Produced, written and directed by Ernie Gehr.

Serpico 1973, motion picture, Paramount Pictures, USA. Produced by Martin Bregman, written by Waldo Salt and Norman Wexler, directed by Sidney Lumet.

Seven 1995, motion picture, New Line Cinema, USA. Produced by Arnold Kopelson and Phyllis Carlyle, written by Andrew Kevin Walker, directed by David Fincher.

Shallow Grave 1995, motion picture, Polygram Filmed Entertainment, UK. Produced by Andrew Macdonald, written by John Hodge, directed by Danny Boyle.

The Shape of Water 2017, motion picture, Fox Searchlight Pictures, USA. Produced by Guillermo del Toro and J. Miles Dale, written by Guillermo del Toro and Vanessa Taylor, directed by Guillermo del Toro.

Short Cuts,1993, motion picture, Fine Line Features, USA. Produced by Cary Brokaw, written by Robert Altman and Frank Barhydt, directed by Robert Altman.

Shutter Island 2010, motion picture, Paramount Pictures, USA. Produced by Mike Medavoy et al., written by Laeta Kalogridis, directed by Martin Scorsese.

Silence of the Lambs 1991, motion picture, Orion Pictures, USA. Produced by Kenneth Utt et al., written by Ted Tally, directed by Jonathan Demme.

The Sixth Sense 1999, motion picture, Hollywood Pictures, USA. Produced by Frank Marshall et al., written and directed by M. Night Shyamalan.

Sliver 1993, motion picture, Paramount Pictures, USA. Produced by Robert Evans, written by Joe Eszterhas, directed by Phillip Noyce.

The Social Network 2010, motion picture, Sony Pictures, USA. Produced by Scott Rudin et al., written by Aaron Sorkin, directed by David Fincher.

Some Like it Hot 1959, motion picture, United Artists, USA. Produced by Billy Wilder, written by Billy Wilder and I. A. L. Diamond, directed by Billy Wilder.

Spectre 2015, motion picture, EON Productions, USA. Produced by Barbara Broccoli and Michael G. Wilson, written by John Logan et al., directed by Sam Mendes.

Song to Song 2017, motion picture, Broad Green Pictures, USA. Produced by Sarah Green et al., written and directed by Terrence Malick.

Soylent Green 1973, motion picture, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, USA. Produced by Walter Seltzer and Russell Thacher, written by Stanley R. Greenberg, directed by Richard Fleischer.

Spaceballs 1987, motion picture, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, USA. Produced by Mel Brooks, written by Mel Brooks et al., directed by Mel Brooks.

Spider 2002, motion picture, Sony Pictures Classics, USA. Produced by David Cronenberg et al., written by Patrick McGrath, directed by David Cronenberg.

Split 2017, motion picture, Universal Pictures, USA. Produced by Jason Blum et al., written and directed by M. Night Shyamalan.

Sssssss 1973, motion picture, Universal Pictures, USA. Produced by Daniel C. Striepeke, written by Hal Dresner and Daniel C. Striepeke, directed by Bernard L. Kowalski.

Star Trek: The Motion Picture 1978*,* motion picture, Paramount Pictures, USA. Produced by Gene Roddenberry, written by Alan Dean Foster and Harold Livingston, directed by Robert Wise.

Star Wars 1977, motion picture, 20th Century Fox, USA. Produced by Gary Kurtz, written and directed by George Lucas.

Star Wars, Episode VII: The Force Awakens 2015, motion picture, Walt Disney Studios, USA. Produced by Kathleen Kennedy et al., written by Michael Arndt et al., directed by J. J. Abrams.

The Straight Story 1999, motion picture, Buena Vista Pictures, USA. Produced by Mary Sweeney et al., written by John Roach and Mary Sweeney, directed by David Lynch.

Stranger Things 2016-, television program, Netflix Streaming Services, USA. Produced by Shawn Levy et al., written by Matt Duffer and Ross Duffer et al., directed by Matt Duffer and Ross Duffer et al.

Stealing Beauty 1996, motion picture, Fox Searchlight Pictures, USA. Produced by Jeremy Thomas, written by Susan Minot, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci.

The Sting 1973, motion picture, Universal Pictures, USA. Produced by Tony Bill et al., written by David S. Ward, directed by George Roy Hill.

Sunset Boulevard 1950, motion picture, Paramount Pictures, USA. Produced by Charles Brackett, written by Charles Brackett et al., directed by Billy Wilder.

Suspicion 1941, motion picture, RKO Radio Pictures, USA. Produced by Alfred Hitchcock and Harry E. Edington, written by Samson Raphaelson et al., directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song 1971, motion picture, Cinemation Industries, USA. Produced by Melvin Van Peebles and Jerry Gross, written and directed by Melvin Van Peebles.

Taxi Driver 1976, motion picture, Columbia Pictures, USA. Produced by Julia Phillips and Michael Phillips, written by Paul Schrader, directed by Martin Scorsese.

Thank You For Smoking 2005, motion picture, Fox Searchlight Pictures, USA. Produced by David O. Sacks, written and directed by Jason Reitman.

Thelma and Louise 1991, motion picture, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, USA. Produced by Ridley Scott and Mimi Polk Gitlin, written by Callie Khouri, directed by Ridley Scott.

The Thin Red Line 1998, motion picture, Twentieth Century Fox, USA. Produced by Robert Michael Geisler et al., written and directed by Terrence Malick.

The Thing 1982, motion picture, Universal Pictures, USA. Produced by David Foster and Lawrence Turman, written by Bill Lancaster, directed by John Carpenter.

Things to do in Denver When You're Dead 1995, motion picture, Miramax Film, USA. Produced by Cary Woods, written by Scott Rosenberg, directed by Gary Fleder.

The Thomas Crown Affair 1968, motion picture, United Artists, USA. Produced by Norman Jewison, written by Alan Trustman, directed by Norman Jewison.

Thoroughly Modern Millie 1967, motion picture, Universal Pictures, USA. Produced by Ross Hunter, written by Richard Morris, directed by George Roy Hill.

Titanic 1997, motion picture, Paramount Pictures, USA. Produced by James Cameron and Jon Landau, written and directed by James Cameron.

To The Wonder 2012, motion picture, Magnolia Pictures, USA. Produced by Sarah Green and Nicolas Gonda, written and directed by Terrence Malick.

Toto le Heros 1991, motion picture, Belgium. Produced by Dany Geys and Luciano Gloor, written by Jaco Van Dormael et al., directed by Jaco Van Dormael.

Toy Story 1995, motion picture, Pixar Animation Studios, USA. Produced by Bonnie Arnold and Ralph Guggenheim, written by Joss Whedon et al., directed by John Lasseter.

Toy Story 2 1999, motion picture, Pixar Animation Studios, USA. Produced by Helene Plotkin and Karen Robert Jackson, written by Andrew Stanton et al., directed by John Lasseter.

Toy Story 3 2010, motion picture, Walt Disney Studios, USA. Produced by Darla K. Anderson, written by Michael Arndt, directed by Lee Unkrich.

Toy Story 4 2019, motion picture, Walt Disney Studios, USA. Produced by Mark Nielsen and Jonas Rivera, written by Andrew Stanton and Stephany Folsom, directed by Josh Cooley.

Transformers 2007, motion picture, Dreamworks Pictures and Paramount Pictures, USA. Produced by Lorenzo di Bonaventura et al., written by Roberto Orci and Alex Kurtzman, directed by Michael Bay.

Transformers: Dark Side of the Moon 2011, motion picture, Paramount Pictures, USA. Produced by Lorenzo di Bonaventura et al., written by Ehren Kruger, directed by Michael Bay.

The Tree of Life 2011, motion picture, Fox Searchlight Pictures, USA. Produced by Sarah Green et al., written and directed by Terrence Malick.

True Detective 2014-, television program, HBO Entertainment, USA. Produced by Nic Pizzolatto et al., written by Nic Pizzolatto et al., directed by Cary Fukunaga et al.

True Romance 1993, motion picture, Warner Brothers, USA. Produced by Gary Barber et al., written by Quentin Tarantino, directed by Tony Scott.

The Truman Show 1998, motion picture, Paramount Pictures, USA. Produced by Scott Rudin et al., written by Andrew Niccol, directed by Peter Weir.

Twelve Monkeys 1995, motion picture, Universal Pictures, USA. Produced by Charles Roven, written by David Peoples and Janet Peoples, directed by Terry Gilliam.

Twin Peaks 1990-1991, television program, American Broadcasting Company, USA. Produced written and directed by David Lynch et al.

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me 1992, motion picture, New Line Cinema, USA. Produced by Gregg Fienberg, written by David Lynch and Robert Engels, directed by David Lynch.

Unbreakable 2000, motion picture, Buena Vista Pictures, USA. Produced by Barry Mendel et al., written and directed by M. Night Shyamalan.

Unforgiven 1992, motion picture, Warner Brothers Pictures, USA. Produced by Clint Eastwood, written by David Peoples, directed by Clint Eastwood.

The Usual Suspects 1995, motion picture, Gramercy Pictures, USA. Produced by Bryan Singer and Michael McDonnell, written by Christopher McQuarrie, directed by Bryan Singer.

Valley of Love 2015, motion picture, Le Pacte, France. Produced by Cyril Colbeau-Justin et al., written and directed by Guillaume Nicloux.

Venredi Soir 2002, motion picture, Canal Plus, France. Produced by Bruno Pesery, written by Claire Denis and Emmanuele Bernheim, directed by Claire Denis.

Voice of the Heart 1989, television program, Portman Productions, UK. Produced by Victor Glynn et al., written by Rita Lakin, directed by Tony Wharmby.

The Walking Dead 2010-, television program, AMC Studios, USA. Written, produced and directed by Frank Darabont et al.

War for the Planet of the Apes 2017, motion picture, 20th Century Fox, USA. Produced by Peter Chernin et al., written by Mark Bomback and Matt Reeves, directed by Matt Reeves.

Wavelength 1967, motion picture, Canyon Cinema, Canada/USA. Written, produced and directed by Michael Snow.

Werckmeister Harmonies 2000, motion picture, 13 Productions, France. Produced by Bela Tarr, written by Laszlo Krasznahorkai, directed by Bela Tarr, co-directed by Agnes Hranitzky.

The West Wing 1999-2006, television program, Warner Brothers Television, USA. Written and produced by Aaron Sorkin et al., directed by Thomas Schlamme et al.

Westworld 1973, motion picture, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, USA . Produced by Paul N. Lazarus III, written and directed by Michael Crichton.

When Harry Met Sally 1988, motion picture, Columbia Pictures, USA. Produced by Nora Ephron et al., written by Nora Ephron, directed by Rob Reiner.

The Wicker Man 1973, motion picture, British Lion Films, UK. Produced by Peter Snell, written by Anthony Shaffer, directed by Robin Hardy.

Wild At Heart 1990, motion picture, The Samuel Goldwyn Company, USA. Produced by Steve Golin et al., written and directed by David Lynch.

The Wizard of Oz 1939, motion picture, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, USA. Produced by Mervyn LeRoy, written by Noel Langley et al., directed by Victor Fleming.

The Wolf of Wall Street 2013, motion picture, Paramount Pictures, USA. Produced by Martin Scorsese et al., written by Terence Winter, directed by Martin Scorsese.

A Woman of Substance 1984, television program, Portman Artemis Productions, UK. Produced by Diane Baker, written by Barbara Taylor Bradford et al., directed by Don Sharp.

Yesterday 2019, motion picture, Universal Pictures, USA. Produced by Tim Bevan et al., written by Richard Curtis, directed by Danny Boyle.

Young Frankenstein 1974, motion picture, 20th Century Fox, USA. Produced by Michael Gruskoff, written by Gene Wilder and Mel Brooks, directed by Mel Brooks.